





# FABRICATING TEXT

## Textual Matters in Material Fictions

*An Appropriate Durable Record  
submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of*

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## Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; and; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Andrew Keall

June 2016

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# FABRICATING TEXT

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### ABSTRACT

In this practice-led Masters by research project I focus on text's often overlooked physical and visual qualities by fabricating and placing text-based forms in unconventional ways. This enables my conceptual enquiry into the two-fold nature of language; first, how its use of signs necessitates that it defines our feelings and experiences from a position at one remove from an experienced event; and secondly, how, in the context of an entire evolutionary fabric, language is a construct inherently belonging to a greater whole. Text encapsulates this paradox neatly. As a visually abstract system of signs for language, it becomes twice removed from the experience described, yet importantly, it has a physical, visual form, and is therefore very much *in* this world. I seek to create artefacts that convey qualities of the fabric that connect these two states, the symbolic and the real, and by doing so I consider the ways in which human language use binds perception and conception in an inextricable, recursive relationship.



## INTRODUCTION

My attention to text as more than just something I looked *through* to receive semantic content, coincided with the beginning of my formal study of printmaking in 2005. In an early project I wrote a short poem, 'The Typewriter Menace', from the view point of a once blank piece of paper:

*...the paper, disturbed from its meditations on the void  
finds itself pulverized by a mechanical insect  
and is distressed to then notice  
an unwelcome audience observing  
these new inky indents and over-  
looking its fibrously, exotic self (1)*

With apologies to blank bits of paper, my concerns shifted to the material and conceptual aspects of those usefully invasive inky indents.

~

But before proceeding, it will be useful here to briefly touch on a few key words I will be using and explain how I intend them to be received.

I will use the word *thing* as a descriptor of an object that is as significant as any other object, whether it is of organic or inorganic origin – and, in particular to my research, the potential of textual forms to be things.

I will use the word *materiality* to denote more than just the measurable material aspects of a form. Materiality encompasses a thing's physical and tactile qualities along with its aesthetic qualities, its symbolism and metaphorical allusions. These modes are activated, in differing weightings, by a viewer's mix of objective/subjective response. The 'viewer' being a projected fiction as I write, but (most likely) actual people in the (hopeful) future. The materiality of a thing is in turn influenced by the proximity of other things' materiality. I extend the idea of what these 'other' relationships can be, to the 'empty' space around an object, and the space the object itself displaces. (2)

I will use the word *player* to suggest an equivalence to an actor in a play – even if the player I refer to is inanimate, such as a textual form. My use of the word player corresponds closely with the concept of an 'actant' (3) in actor-network theory, where people, things and ideas all have the potentiality for germinal narrative actions, but rely on the participation of the other parts of the 'network' to actually manifest the action.

I also use the word *real* in the limited sense of indicating external experience, and apply this term as a way to better discuss, by contrast, the abstracting and symbolic nature of language signs. I use 'real' in this way to better describe the paradoxical positions that text forms can inhabit, while acknowledging the contradiction this distinction makes with my use of the terms 'player' and 'thing' when applied to text.

I also position my art practice within an Absurdist (4) tradition, and use the word *Absurd* within the context of this philosophical position, which I will discuss in-depth under the Methodology heading below.



Why am I concerned by the materiality of text? And what can be gained by such an investigation?

“Language represents a first, gross abstraction from the uniqueness of every real experience because without that abstraction meaningful communication about the world would be impossible between one person and another.”  
(5)

Language and text are mediums of communication that apply a system of conventions to codify sounds and visual marks that can convey a person’s thoughts or describe their experiences to others.

Language may have originated as a form of magical evocation, its abstractive construction being conceptualised as a medium of conduit to higher powers (6), before its use within everyday communication made the quality of its transference into a more prosaic affair.

Regarding the idea of language origins and its changing utility, some years ago I wrote:

*the letter A  
once a conduit to and from  
the Divine  
one day reduced  
made simply  
to Define*

Yet, even when used prosaically, language, upon hearing, or visualised and then read as text, has the uncanny capacity to conjure a mental image in a recipient’s mind. But there are limits - language is composed of a finite quantity of words, organised within syntactical structures. Hence communicative dialogues are facilitated and mentally conjured connections are made, even as the constitutional limits of language restrict its potential breadth as a medium of communication. Depending upon the context of consideration language can be creatively expansive or rigidly restrictive.

Regarding the use of mediums in general, Marshall McLuhan comments:

“Each form of transport not only carries, but translates and transforms, the sender, the receiver, and the message. The use of any kind of medium or extension of man alters the patterns of interdependence among people, as it alters the ratios among senses.” (7)

When considering the way language structures and limitations “alters patterns of interdependence and ratios among senses”, it is also important to be aware of the yawning gulf that appears between the capacity of language to describe an experience from one person to another, and the lived experience itself. The real world, as it *is* moment to moment, is always *before* (temporally) and *beyond* (dimensionally) language’s classifying structure and codification attempt to communicate it. Acts of interpretation and codification necessitate an intellectualisation at the expense of the sensory and tactile, and further, requires a translation of equivalence (though never equal) from the real to the symbolic domain. Cultural patterns and ratios between the senses are re-formed through this intellectualisation that distances us from the tactile and immediate (8). These ideas are readdressed within the context of Gutenberg’s ‘revolution’ under the Methodology section.

To a degree our social interdependence is transacted through language, placing a weight of import upon our relationship to the symbolic realm. The efficacy of these transactions relies on a form of proxy acceptance of the verificative effect that language versions of the events enables, and this poses questions as to the limits of our credulity. Considered in this way, language use becomes more of a matter of faith than of common sense, and to believe that language use is actually conveying the 'truth' of a lived experience is an act of non-sense – an Absurd proposition. However, for those invested in using language as a communicative tool, overlooking this non-sense is such a pervasive and ubiquitous act (and I am doing it as I use text here and above and below) that nonsense is rendered into a kind of sense, or more to the point, accepted as sense by sensible people.

Yet, as text, language is a *thing*, a thing which experiences can be shaped by and feelings arise from. And this *thingness* enables text's materiality to be an agent of signification, evoking meanings and responses that may either enhance a word's semantic content, or completely contradict the language-based meaning of a written word. In discussing her work with text and image, the Artists' Book maker Johanna Drucker says:

"There are two basic issues motivating my work. The way in which visual structures actually produce meaning, and the relation between language and experience. This relationship is an issue central to the philosophy of language, raising the question of whether language is merely descriptive of the world, in fact mirrors it in its very structure, or actually creates the world and its apparent order as a mental construct." (9)

Text's materiality, in all its infinite possible variations, and what it may signify beyond what a word as text may semantically 'say', instigates a multitude of potential convergences or conflicts between signifying systems. That language, as Drucker points out, may more than attempt to symbolically mirror the real, but mentally construct it, adds a dimension of virtuality to relationship dynamics between materiality, semantics and semiotics. Are we then actually immersed within a multi-dimensional mirror-maze?... but because this is too difficult, we conveniently believe that words simply follow after the world, or even better still, originate and flow from a divinely inspired source, descending with comforting sureness and linearity.

A complex place indeed, and here in this mirror-maze I locate my research. But how to proceed when an apparent step forward may not only be backwards or twisting sideways, but be simultaneously flitting between dimensions and shuffling with a quick two-step into other domains?

Fortunately, my practice-led research approach has provided a means to instigate movement in this uncertain and fluid landscape/language-scape by making text things, observing them in different contexts and thinking through them.

The following two questions have acted as both guide and perimeter for my project:

What can I reveal by elevating text to the state of a performative player simultaneous to its semantic function within fictional situations?

What can I reveal about text and image relationships through the illusory and actual interplay of two and three-dimensional materiality?

Reflecting on these two questions as I near the final stages of my project I can see how much I packed into them – they may have been articulated more concisely by breaking them down, creating more questions but with smaller parts. Yet, all of the key ingredients were/are there, and by being so, they have provided a genuine research impulse in a complex area that additionally involved the thorny dynamic of trying to use language in part to describe language use.

‘Puzzled, I raised my hand a bit and slowly broke off a branchlet from an  
enormous thorn: and the great trunk of it cried:

“Why do you break me?””

Dante *The Divine Comedy* p 13, Thames & Hudson, London, 1982

## NOW AND THEN

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In this section I will chronologically show the objects, or artefacts, I have made. I will relate how my 'thinking through practice' connected me in various ways to other thinkers/writers/theorists, who considered the implications of language use, and how these connections, in turn, developed and clarified my conceptual thinking, and reflexively effected what I then made.

When comparing this 'thinking through practice' approach to a science based research approach, Graham Sullivan, in his book *Art Practice as Research* states:

"What is common is the attention given to rigor and systematic enquiry, yet in a way that privileges the role of imagination and intellect plays in constructing knowledge that is not only new but has the capacity to transform human understanding." (10)

As my research methodology utilises a creative and practice-based enquiry, my own intuitions and subjective decisions inspire the sometimes multi-directional propulsion of my research. By tracing my research chronologically in this Appropriate Durable Record, I am attempting to expose a trail for a reader of this document to follow, and hopefully, by following a narrative construction of start, middle and finish to the whole, the story of my research will make sense and be interesting/useful to follow. Though there was a temporal, and therefore linear progression to my research, my sense is that the creative, intuitive leaps I make throughout are of a different order that are more interestingly located in the continuum of the present moment. Maybe it is more accurate to imagine a sphere that expands as my research progresses, creating a sparky spaciousness not reliant on a linear model of progress. My chronological record is still 'true' in that it recognises and elucidates significant moments, aspects and influences in the order they occurred.

## CHAPTER 1: FLAT(ISH)LAND

Over the last two years my research activities have evolved my understanding of the field I am investigating, and no doubt there is still much that eludes me in terms of what I am capable of perceiving and articulating. The research journey has affirmed to me the importance of 'practice led'; what I have made has truly facilitated this process of creative investigations and accordant understandings.

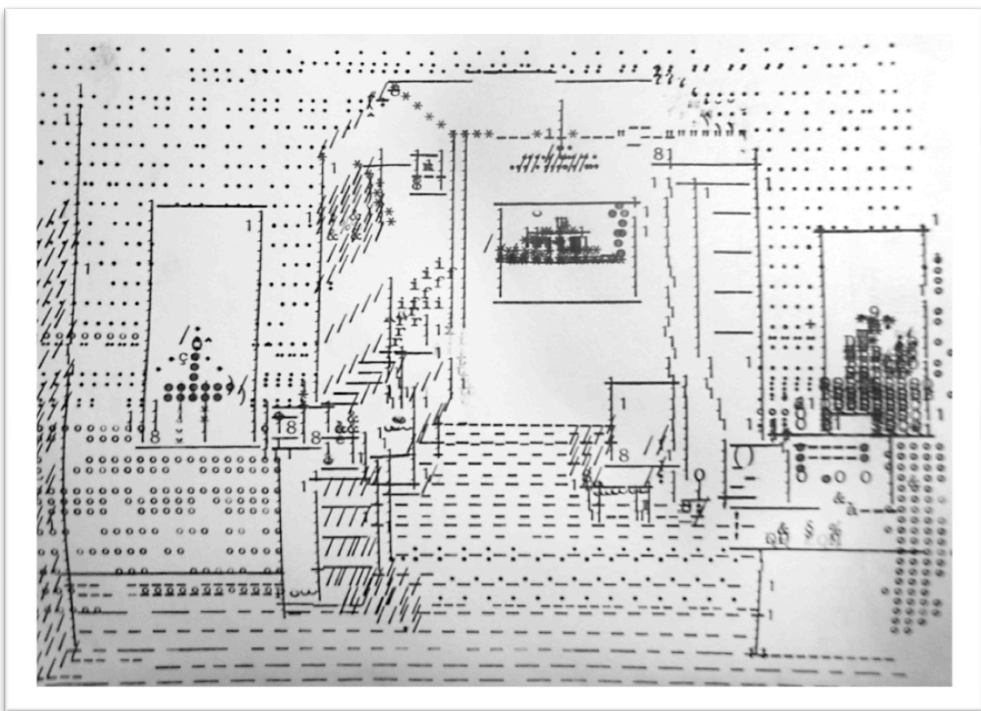
Leading up to this research project, I was already exploring relationships of text and image and text as image. The means and methods I had used up to this point; drawing, painting, printmaking, the typewriter as mark maker, and animation were conceptually and technically opening my art practice into new ground that felt both exciting and necessary to explore further. This new focus, and the combinations of means and methods I was using, felt as if they would provide an interesting 'tool set' to make use of within this research project.



*The Word Og Entangled*, 2012  
120 x 80cm  
oil on canvas



Still from the animation *Middle of Life*, 2013  
1920 x 1080 pixels  
duration 90sec



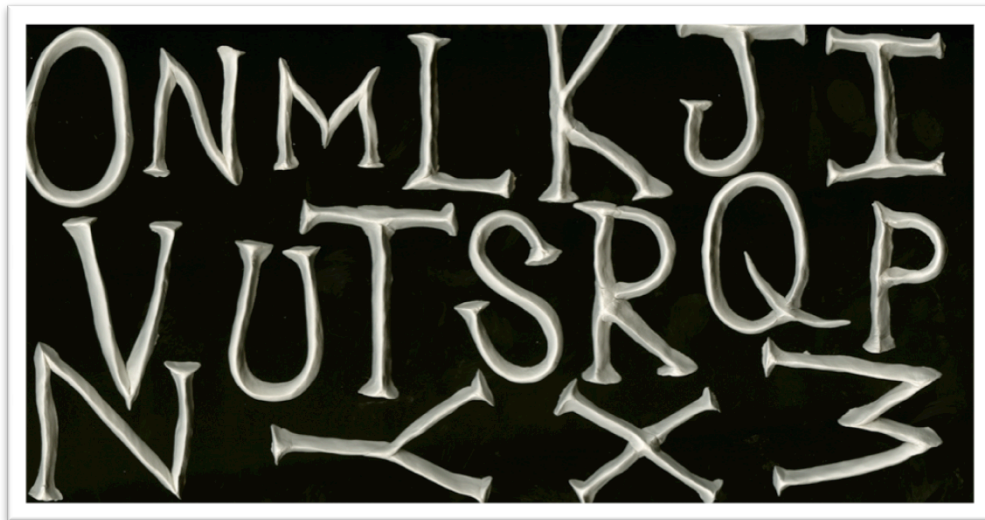
*Room in Rives*, typewriter drawing, 2013

My starting point was a consideration of the dimensional void between a word and its referent object. Of particular interest was the act of mental construction, or signifying, required of a person to fill, or cross over this void. That this act required such a curious mixture of learnt conventions and momentary belief in the veracity of the sign, peaked my Absurdist antennae. I looked to Semiotics, with its focus on the constructs within a language sign, as a starting point.

The conception of language as a sign system that could be studied in an objective manner was developed by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913). In his book *Course in General Linguistics* (1916) he analysed language as a formal system of linguistic sign use.

“Our definition of the linguistic sign poses an important question of terminology. I call the combination of a concept and a soundimage a sign, but in current usage the term generally designates only a sound-image, a word. One tends to forget that arbor (tree) is called a sign only because it carries the concept "tree," with the result that the idea of the sensory part implies the idea of the whole arbor. Ambiguity would disappear if the three notions involved here were designated by three names, each suggesting and opposing the others. I propose to retain the word sign [signe] to designate the whole and to replace concept and sound-image respectively by signified [signifié] and signifier [signifiant]; the last two terms have the advantage of indicating the opposition that separates them from each other and from the whole of which they are parts.” (11)

To begin then, I needed to make words/signifiers, and to make words I first needed to both make alphabets and find pre-made ones.

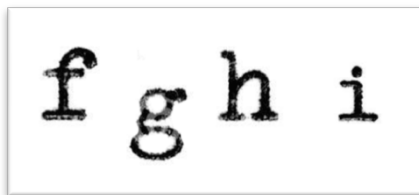


letters made from modelling clay, 2014





paper cut-out alphabet, 2014



sample of letters from scans of typewriter written alphabet, 2014



sample of letters made from plaster casts, 2014



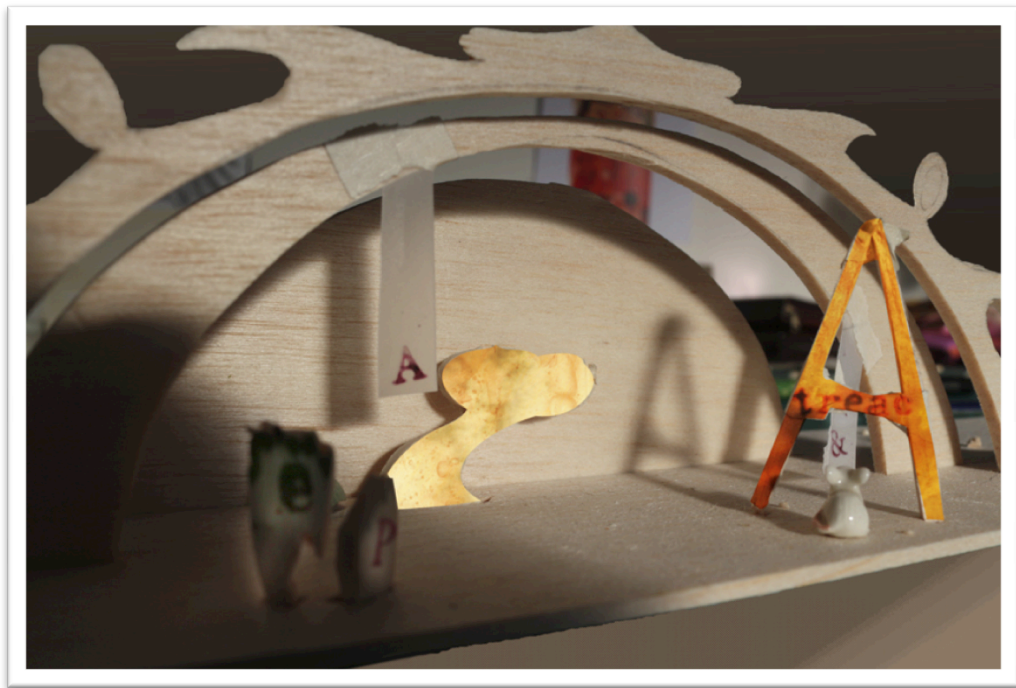
sample of letters from found alphabets



more samples of letters from found alphabets, 2014

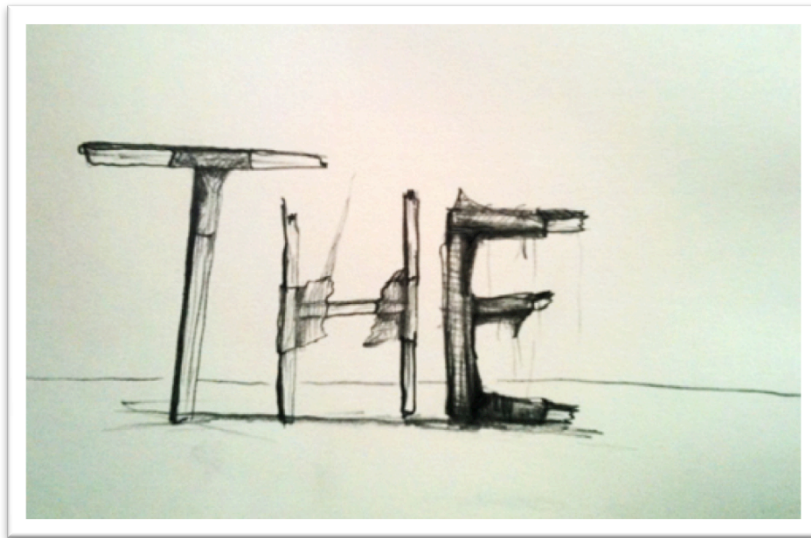
I formed the modelling clay alphabet in both upper and lower case sets. The attributes of the clay letter forms - the rhythms of proportion and bend, serif and bevel – were characterised by my finger tips' shapes and rhythms of squeezed pressure. Wobbles and inconsistencies in this alphabet's edges, shapes and surfaces mirrored the roundness and softness of my fingers as they massaged the forms into legible letter shapes. Using my hands in this way connected the alphabetical letters' 'bodies' to the forms, rhythms and intentions of my body.

Other letters were created from balsa wood, held frailly together with white-tac and masking tape. Their barely connected 'limbs' and the masking tape 'bandages' invoked for me scenes in a make-believe, language hospital after a semantic disaster.



balsa stage mock-up, 2014

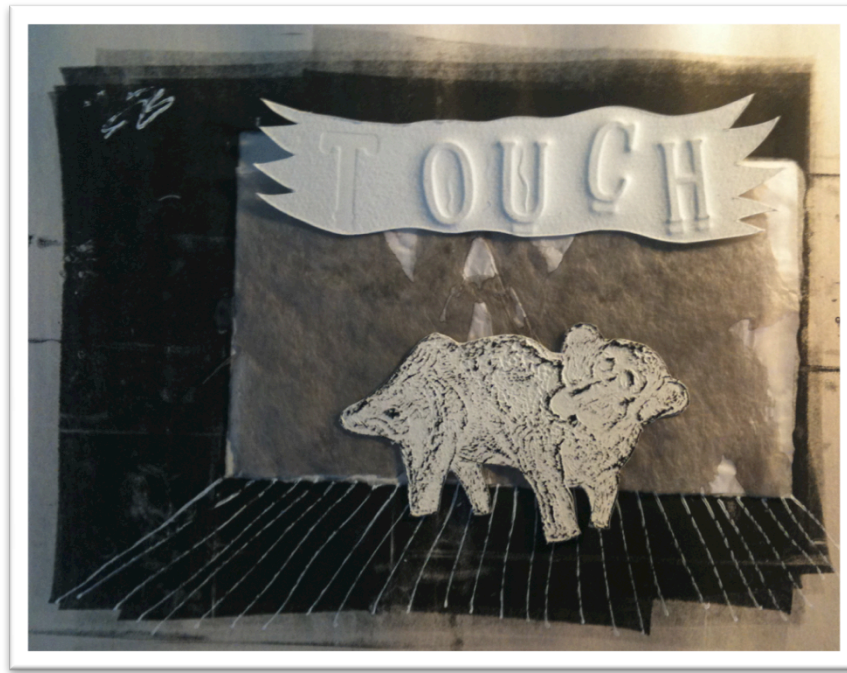




working drawing, 2014



early table-top mock-ups, 2014

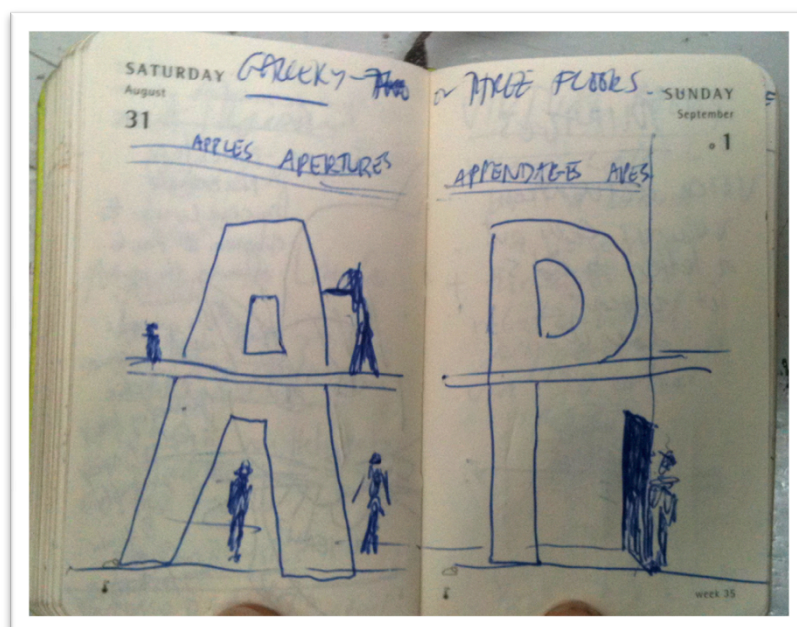
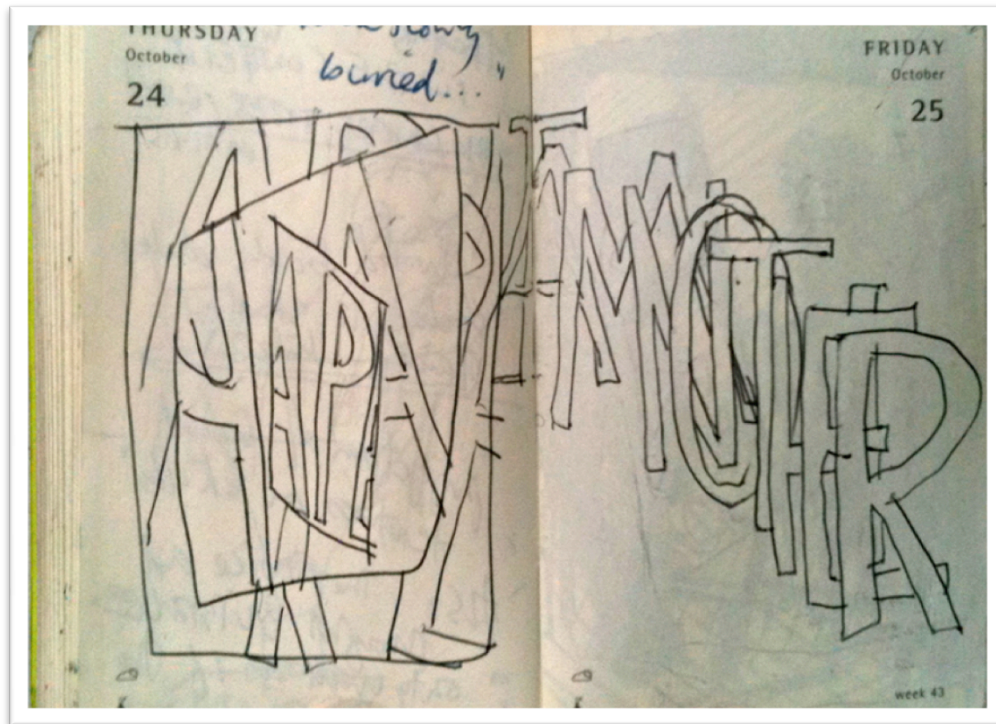


mock-up 2D stage, 2014

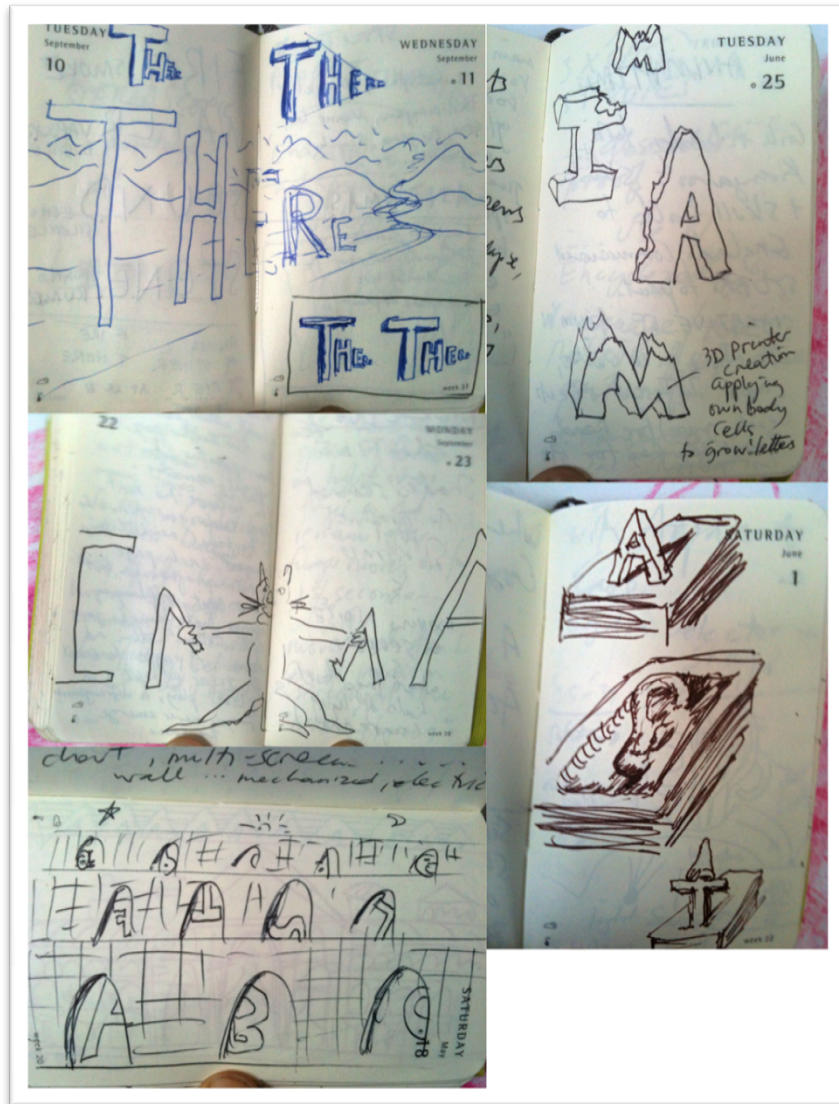
I also constructed propositional mini-theatre stages with transparent sheets of plastic, mirrored surfaces and balsa wood; the movability of these floors, walls and props allowed table top sized, theatrical scaffolds to be quickly assembled and rearranged for various enactments of letters, words and objects. As these enactments developed in complexity, additional shapes were also cut to create narrative players in silhouette form, sometimes with the addition of stamped or embossed lettering on their surfaces. Found objects such as old toy clocks and plastic animals also made appearances as props in, and witnesses to, these small theatrical arrangements. Natural and projected light sources were trialled as a means to create an ambiguous sense of dimensionality, or to focus attention on a key object or relationship.

This growing collection of letters and objects enabled a diverse range of assemblages. This array suited my making 'speed' arrangements, and I also began making thumbnail sketches as a means to engender further ideas and iterations of combinations very quickly. This methodology, whereby avenues were explored almost as quickly as ideas formed, helped circumnavigate language's intervention as a voice of 'reason', an intervention that could break the flow of my intuitive thinking. Understanding this working process and language's place within, or deliberately outside of it, allowed an early glimpse at key thematic aspects regarding modes of knowing and states of being that arose repeatedly throughout the course of my research. This visual notation method, in combination with rearranging letters and objects at a table-top scale, became a primary method of generating ideas throughout this project, and the resultant photo documentation and sketches formed a repository of ideas that I have periodically returned to throughout this project.





pages from sketch book, 2014



pages from sketch book, 2014

## THEATRES OF THE WORD

One particular idea initially generated via my table top arrangements and developed further in my sketching, resonated with my research questions. To describe how I initially viewed the content of the following sketch: the word *mass* signifies a quantity of matter. A horse-shaped mass stands in front of the word MASS, blocking out the SS – so MASS becomes MA. A horse can be the mother, or Ma, of an ASS – and so an Ass-shaped mass stands in front of a second word MASS, hiding the M, hence ASS is spelt/signified. This intertwining of the real and the symbolic worlds, signifier and signified, and the staging, or performative aspect, felt promising.





early sketch of an idea that became the first etching of a series; key content generated by this series of etchings was then adapted into the animation *Mass*.

I proceeded to digitally collage imagery sourced from scans of the modelling clay alphabet and plastic animals, and utilising the digital freedoms afforded in Photoshop to manipulate imagery, composed a mock-up that served as a working drawing to be translated into an etching.

To achieve the required pits and grooves in the copper plate, a series of different etching procedures were used; soft ground for the initial drawing; aquatint for areas with continuous tone; burnishing to produce tonal shifts and highlights; and finally dry-point, to darken some lines.



*Mass, Mass, Ma & Ass* 2014, 30 x 12cm, softground, aquatint, burnishing, drypoint, Ed 14

The resulting printed image (above) was well received by peers and staff. Encouraged by this, and my sense that this method of working would be interesting and useful to extend, I applied the same working methods of making table top arrangements of objects and related sketching to develop ideas for a series of etchings, that became a suite of six etchings that I named *Theatres of the Word*.

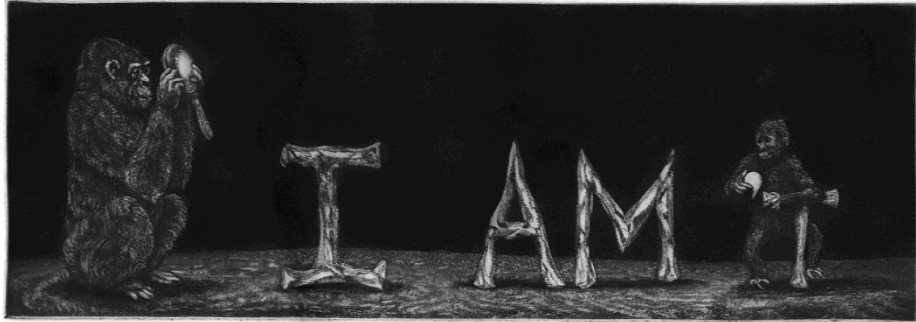




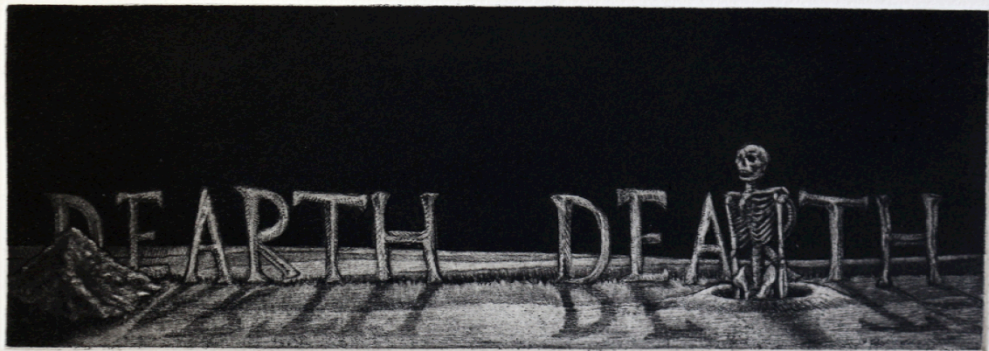
*Was* 2014, 30 x 12cm, softground, aquatint, burnishing, drypoint, Ed 14



*Git* 2014, 30 x 12cm, softground, aquatint, burnishing, drypoint, Ed 14



*I Am't* 2014, 30 x 12cm, softground, aquatint, burnishing, drypoint, Ed 14



*Dearth* 2014, 30 x 12cm, softground, aquatint, burnishing, drypoint, Ed 14



*Aped* 2014, 30 x 12cm, softground, aquatint, burnishing, drypoint, Ed 14

Recurrent themes were discernable in the *Theatres of the Word* etchings. On a thematically *intentional* level the players were connected in a signifier/signified relationship. Also, a play between spatial dimensions was enacted, with the paper's flat surface hosting an illusory three-dimensional space. In regards to this, the varying thickness of the printing ink on the paper created a low lying surface topography, creating an additional two and three-dimensional dynamic. On an *unintentional*, intuited level, themes emerged such as mirroring and distortion, sign use as a carrier of cultural knowledge between generations, the temporal past as a mental construct evoked through language, language enabling a self-consciousness vs. death, with the death of self being the lack of the self-mirroring performance in/through language, and a nature/culture duality.

## MASS

I felt that the content and ideas generated through the creation of these etchings were worth exploring further. I introduced the temporal dimension by adapting content from these etchings into an animation. Motivating this decision was my curiosity regarding the players in these etchings; how they would interact given a freedom from being fixed in space and time?

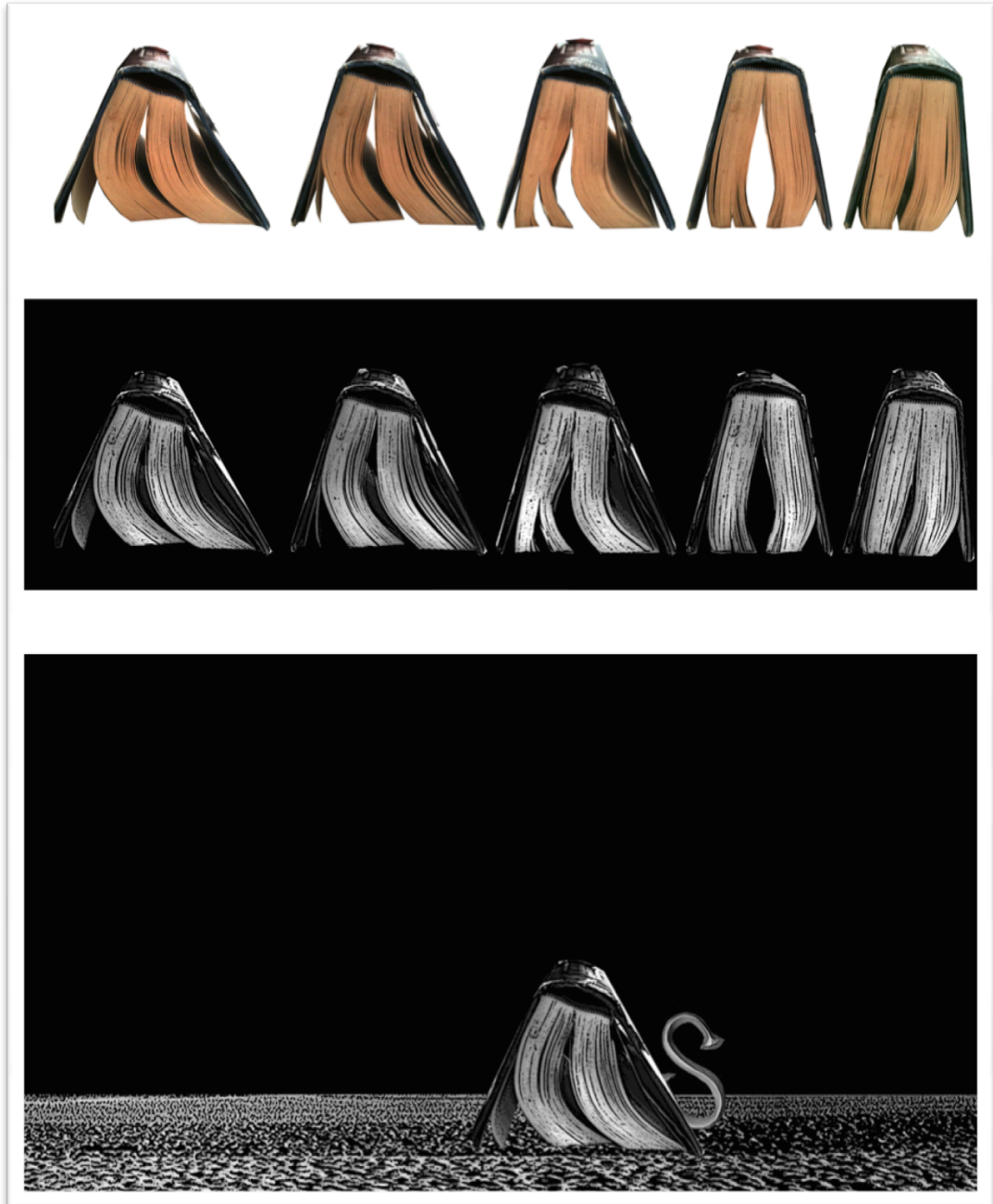
The programme After Effects was my choice of digital tool. I had had some experience with it, and knew of, though hadn't yet used, its facility to place two-dimensional graphics in a virtual three-dimensional space. This functionality enables players to be positioned in a forward/behind arrangement in virtual space, which allows a more fluid animating process, making the spatial relationships, and therefore the interactions between the players, more convincing. Additionally, this was another iteration to explore between two and three-dimensional relationships.



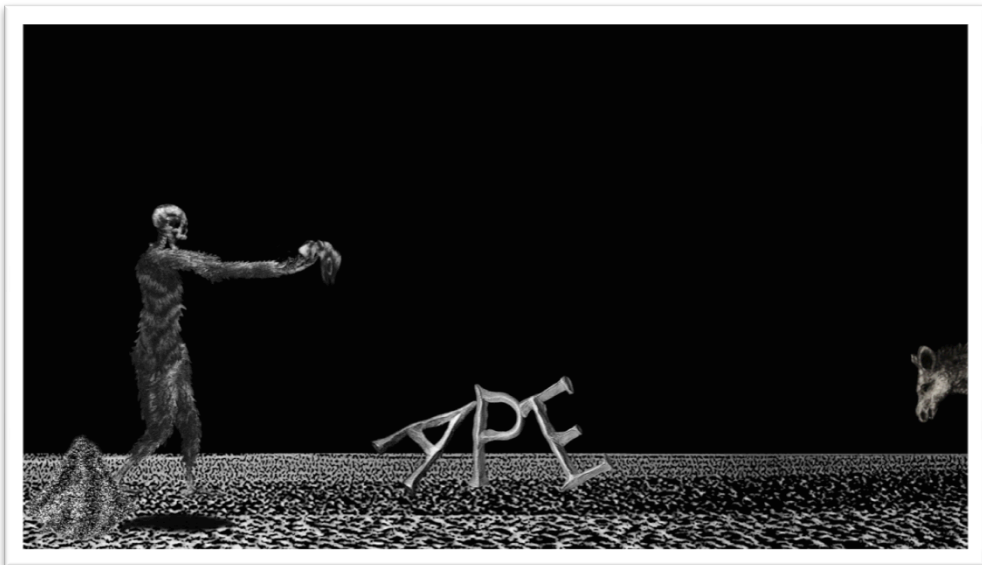
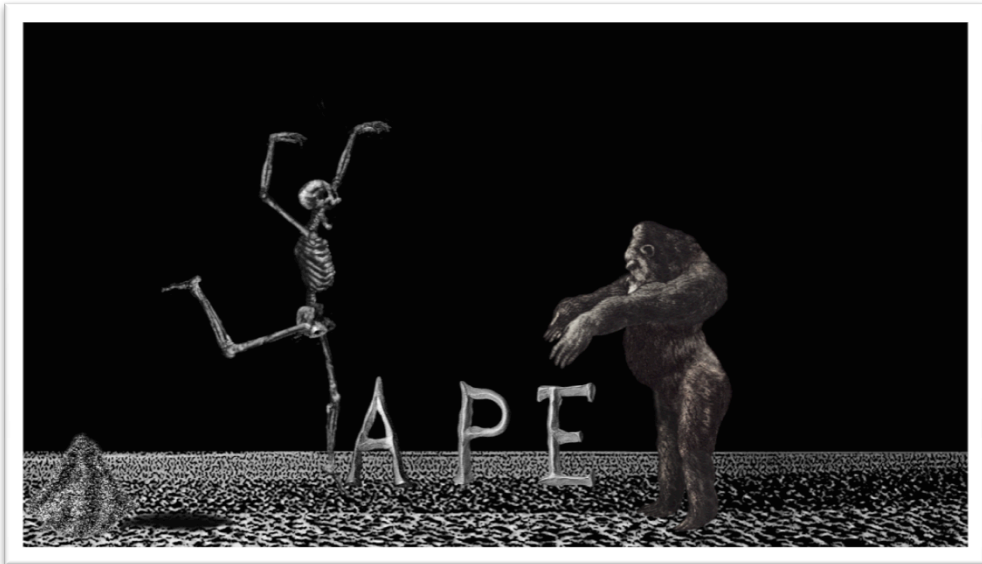
I wrote an initial plot line and drew up a story board. I had previously created animations (in the programme Macromedia Flash) using a method of 'joining' the parts (limbs, head, torso, etc.), of a character in a way that simulated the articulation of parts used by hinged marionettes. I knew, once the relationships between the limbs and joints of a character were digitally fixed (both in position and in a hierarchy of 'who leads who' relationships – technically named in After Effects, a 'parent/child' relationship), that I could instigate a character's gesturing or traversal of space, and resultant interactions between the players, very quickly – thus avoiding the slow progress that is often a drawback when creating animations. This speediness enabled new narrative developments to be intuited as I worked, and be soon followed by the characters actually performing these new ideas. The story board provided an initial guide, but the working method described allowed a two-way conversation between myself as 'director', and the players – how would they respond if *this* had just happened *there*? It was in these unscripted, intuited ideas that I believed particularly interesting and revealing insights might emerge.

	empty landscape, few trees, much sky ...  SOUND: 1. almost silence... subliminal drone/hum fluctuating slightly... pause 2. distant approach of rustling stomp of walking book (from our/stage right)
	Book enters stage right, 'walking' via book covers flexing  SOUND: 1. drone (this sound fluctuates throughout the whole anim, sometimes becoming dramatically intense...) 2. book walking onto stage...
	As book passes through centre stage it gives a fluttering leap. It does this 4 times, each time leaving a letter behind. The word MASS is left in the book's wake - exits stage left.  SOUND: 1. book flutter leap 2. book walk and receding 'steps' as it leaves scene stage left
	Short interval of time. 'Ma' (horse) just enters stage right  SOUND: 1. approach of Ma's steps (creaking clomps of hinged joints and footfalls)
	'Ass' enters stage left, pauses, then proceeds up to letters  SOUND: 1. Ass's steps
	Ass nudges over letter M to leave the word ASS still standing. Ass then passes across stage and exits stage right. Ma watches curiously, moving head up and down...  SOUND: 1. Ass's steps 2. letter M falls 3. creak of Ma's head movements
	Ape enters stage left - walks up to letters and stands up the fallen 'M', but upside down (spelling WASS), but in doing so bumps the letters like a pendulum knocking over last S to then spell WAS. Ma watches...  SOUND: 1. Ape's creaky (hinged) approach and entry 2. sound of letter placement and fall 3. creak of Ma's head movements
	Ass re-enters stage right - they observe Ape observing his handiwork.  SOUND: 1. Ass's steps
	Ape suddenly picks up 'W' and bashes each letter in turn - upon being struck they each turn into another letter, forming the word APE  SOUND: 1. letter bashing

first page of the story board for animation *Mass* 2014



development of the book walk in action/having just disgorged the letter S in the first scene



stills from various scenes of *Mass* 2015

*Mass* has a duration of 4.30 mins, yet took eight weeks to make – though that is very quick by animation standards. Even by applying the working methods discussed to accelerate the pace of the processes involved, the pacing of time-based interrelations required careful tweaking. And there was an additional aspect - working with After Affects (a complex programme often described as Photoshop with a time line) required learning new skills, let alone remembering old ones. Once the visual aspect of *Mass* was completed I worked with the sound designer, Nick Kreisler, to create the sound-scape. This mixture - a working pace that allowed for intuited ideas to be enacted, along with a slow-time tweaking - was very successful in terms of enabling the process of 'thinking through practice'. In a more creative and organic analogy, this process was like digging, planting, watering, and harvesting new research ground.

The fruit then: the walking book that traverses the landscape in the first and last scenes in *Mass*, initially disgorges the letters MASS and then, in the finale, consumes the broken remains of the letters and the skeleton/death character. The book becomes the giver and taker of form/life, or rather, the vessel that contains the symbols that when divulged allow an embodied consciousness to conceive of an 'is-self'. And then, from this self-conscious vantage, articulate the distinctions that separate unified processes (or *a* unified process) into component parts; beginning and end, material and immaterial, life and death, I and thou, human and animal...

Within this book enabled, word-spawned world Ape manipulates words but flees the terrible consequences of signifiers become signified. Death disinters itself and tries to reclaim life by donning Ape's skin and crushing the signs that permit a conception of *having* consciousness and therefore making distinctions, i.e. between life and death. Tragically for Death however, its destruction of language signs heralds its own destruction – through its annihilation of the symbolic world its capacity to be self-consciously a being was also lost. All returns, again, consumed by the Book.

From this 'reading' of *Mass* I began to consider language and words as more than tools in an epistemological sense; rather they were givers, had the power to bestow a state of being that was aware of having being, and thus words were themselves agents with ontological impact and import.

It was through this insight that I reconsidered the potentiality of text's materiality and its affective capacity. Materiality then, placed text *in* the world as a player amongst others, as ontologically important within the flow of events as any other. Additionally, through the agency of its materiality, text evoked connotative associations beyond its semantic, denotative role.

My exploration of the void between a sign's signification and its referent object had expanded to encompass a sign's materiality and its signifying action. Louis Hjelmslev (1899-1965) had expanded on Saussure's concept of the linguistic sign, adding to its conception a plane of content and a plane of expression. The form that a sign took in the expression plane was determined by its material nature. Yet Hjelmslev didn't pursue this avenue of enquiry, asserting that the form, a sign's material expression took, was unimportant as the sign still referred to the same content. Both Saussure's and Hjelmslev's semiotic approach to an analysis of language was confined by a Structuralist methodology, and therefore overlooked a theoretical appreciation of a sign's materiality as an independent signifier (12).

The movement of my conceptual insight was pushing at this very point, but with a very different conception of the import of a sign's materiality.

In part, as I claim this ground and posit Hjelmslev's theoretical position whilst displaying my own wider conception, I'm guessing my expanded definition of materiality goes beyond Hjelmslev's consideration of the make-up of a sign's material form – what it could be, and therefore do. At this point of my research *being* and *doing* had become the key operative terms, forming a framework that could encompass investigating aspects of text's materiality.

## PART 2: TURNING PAGES

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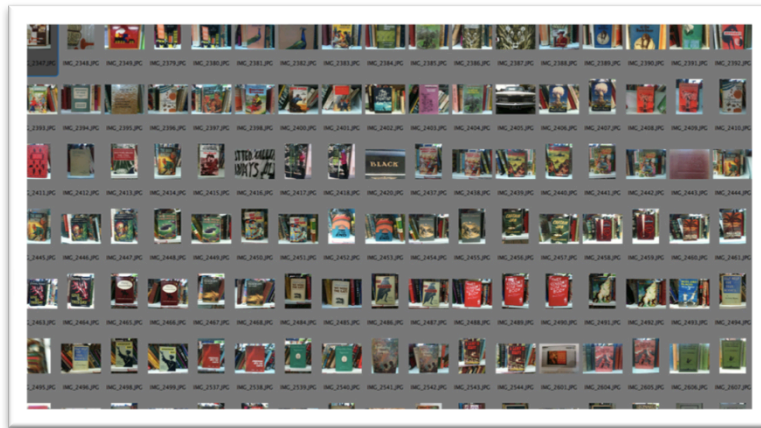
Having been born into a bookish family – my Mother reviewed children's literature and had written and illustrated small one-off books for my siblings and I as kids – I was, pre-research, very sensitive to books as things of import (their evocative tactility and colours, their curious integration of two and three-dimensions, their shaping of text and image relationships in space and time, the familiar way hands navigated their weighty architecture and unfolded their bodies, their myriad of aged and/or fresh smells...). But now, within my research world, and post *Mass* considerations, the Book had assumed an iconic status, representing language's power to bestow the facility to conceive that I *am* a being in this world that *is* being in this world, and that was not all(!) – book-given language was more than reflective, but constructive, *making* my world through its unique tinting and framing agency.

At the start of this project I deemed it necessary to make and find alphabets – now it seemed necessary to find and make books.

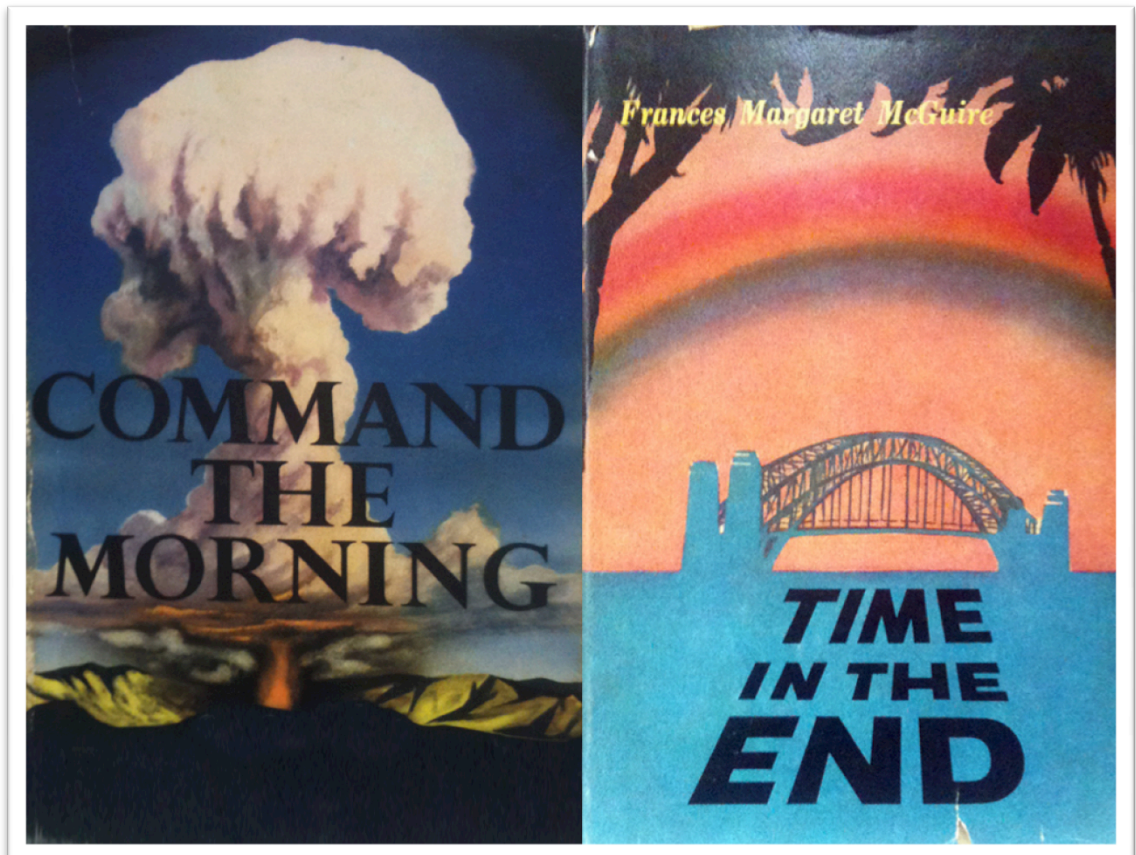
### BOOKS FOUND-OUT

My first step at this next stage was to photograph book covers, spines and title pages found in a huge local op shop (that had an extensive and categorised book section with a large turnover of stock). My choices as to which book was worthy of taking a photo was initially intuitive – analysing my choices later on, after some hundreds of images had been collected, I understood that the aspect I was picking up on was, within a title construct, an Absurdist collapsing of different language domains that ordered and defined perceived objects and conceived ideas.





screen shot of portion of collected book cover images



An initial idea for these book images was to create a screen-based interactive that utilised a pre-pokies-like interface. The person playing would be able to instigate different chance conjunctions of covers, title pages, with images selected from the last five centuries of printmaking.



mock-up of 'pokies' style book covers interactive

The potential chance juxtapositions of words and images in combination with the playful interactivity of an audience were both appealing aspects of this idea. But as I worked with this material, different sequences of titles began to coagulate into something more substantial. A poetic structure – a kind of staccato verse form - began to emerge. The sequentially connected title phrases began to suggest thematic content that had already been touched on in the *Theatres of the Word* and in *Mass*; namely, constructing a version of the world through language, conjuring past and future events through language, and knowledge retention and transmission. Also, an interesting new thematic aspect became apparent - language and writing as an extension of the body.

Looking through the photos of the book images had instigated a form of temporal and sequential viewing, and sensing that the emergent themes could best be explored in a time-based activation, I again used the digital application *After Effects*. I also looked to my previous experience of this medium – how it had facilitated a working process wherein a mix of slow-thought design and quick intuitive decisions successfully generated new insights. Additionally, the texts on the book covers and the other players could be paced in their appearance and interactions through time so as to impart a better sense of their almost portentous versification.

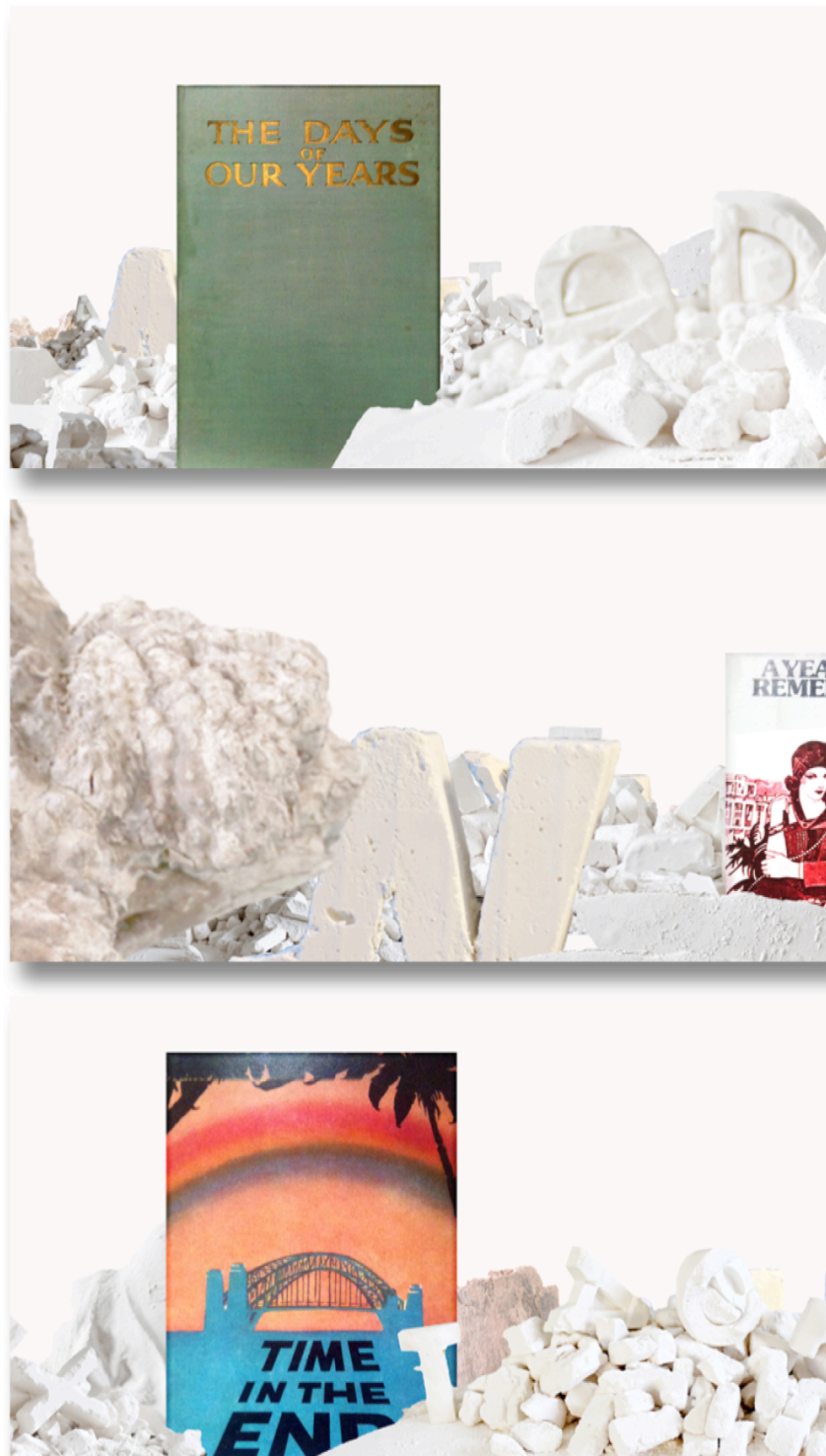
In the animation *After All* (images of frames on a following page) the imagery is revealed through a 'bird's eye' virtual camera fly-through of an environment strewn with piled-up rubble letter forms. The book covers and title pages are situated somewhat like over-sized tomb stones, interspersed amongst the mounds of broken letters.

The main theme suggested in the sequential revelation of *After All's* book covers' titles is constructed visions of past and future events within a nostalgically tinted encompass of memory and projected future possibilities. Language instigates a conception of past and future events through its

employment of a verb forms as indicators of such constructs. By instigating a conception of these imaginary times and places beyond the here and now, language actively constructs a form of conception, and therefore of being, but a type of being invested within the symbolic realm. In the book cover 'Time in the End' the language used (and if you were in doubt the cover's imagery 'spells' it out), casts an ill-hued, melodramatic pale over our perception of what may come, therefore affecting, maybe with a sense of dread, a here and now experience. Language entangles itself between and all-around our perceptions of, and conceptions derived from, our lives as lived, being lived, and will be lived. The powerful effects of this imaginative conjuring alters who we are, and how we act, in the present. The linear process of cause and effect, as experienced temporally, is therefore twisted and re-spun within language constructs, altering the emotions we feel in our environments, and therefore our conception of what is our present physical reality, and actions therefore taken.

Language as a constructive force had been present in both *Theatres of the Word* and *Mass*. The recurrence of this idea in these last two animation projects solidified my sense that this conceptual ground was a vital aspect of my research. In Martin Heidegger's (1889-1976) *The Origin of the Work of Art* (13) he makes a distinction between the Earth and the World; "There is only 'world' where there is language, that is, understanding of being". Earth, he describes as; "on which and in which man bases his dwelling". The work of a work of art is to make the world 'open' to the earth, but in a way that that foreclose any fixed meanings. Most pertinent to my research at this point was the concept of 'world' as a language construct, differentiated from the primal, instinctual, physical place and psychic realm of dwelling, Earth. Alan Watts, the western scholar and writer on the Tao and Zen Buddhism, states, "Let us remind ourselves that Taoism is based on the recognition that the world as described is included in but not the same as the world as it is" (14). A comparison of these two texts and their terminology regarding language's role in 'making', and not just describing, could be drawn between Heidegger's 'Earth' and Watts' 'world as it is'. *After All* alludes to this aspect of language separating humans from an instinctual base, while framing this idea within the broken letter strewn landscape, and the slow fly-through, dream-like unfolding of it all. *After All* suggests a sense of urgency in recognising this dream-like transposition of reality into language, making a fallacious translation of our experiences into *the* experience. *After All* obliquely conveys; Snap-out-of-it! before it is too late and consciousness has departed yet another language-ridden body.





stills from *After All* 2014, duration 1.20sec

In *Time Trace* (images on next page) a monumental book cover sits in a slowly moving and evolving landscape. Periodically a new book plummets from above, crushing into flying smithereens the book beneath. The narrative that unfolds, as revealed by the words and images on the books, evokes writing as a container of communicable knowledge (though an inevitably transient one), a gesture issuing from the body and passed like a genetic inheritance from one

generation to the next as both tool and memorandum. Human efforts to hold onto the past, or gain a form of immortality through the written record, are cast finally in this animation, against onlooking, but ultimately uncaring, stars above.



stills from *Time Trace* 2014, duration 1.30sec

The essential conceptual ground covered in these two animations was two-fold; firstly, language as more than a tool to reflect experience in the world, but language as a constructive medium that reframes experience within its own strictures. And secondly, the connection of language, its originating source, to bodily gesture and physical expression.

Looking back to my first act of making in this project, when I squeezed the clay alphabet into shape, I could recognise the presence of the body *in* the letter forms and the letter forms *as* bodies. *After All* and *Time Trace* had allowed this idea to be explicitly recognised and expanded, and this now allowed me to identify ideas within the theory of Phenomenology that became pertinent to my research progress.

Phenomenology privileges bodily, perceptual experience, tracing the originating form of signs to a bodily gestalt. Phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) locates the perceptive agency of a body as the founding site of language:

“Everything is both manufactured and natural in man, as it were, in the sense that there is not a word, not a form of behaviour which does not owe something to purely biological being.” (15)

In discussing Merleau-Ponty’s ideas around the relationship of perception and conception, Douglas Low says:

“Perception (and, we may also add, external and internal sensations of all sorts, including emotions) are primary terms that suggest certain linguistic expressions, yet these linguistic expressions are needed to fold back upon the perceived and felt in order to express them more precisely.” (16)

Merleau-Ponty suggests that the origin of words is biological and words are an expressive gesture from the body that, as symbols, fold back towards perception. This focus on the corporeal origin of words suggests fertile ground in terms of possible relationships and ramifications between textual states and other things. Does text as matter, matter, as a body may matter? Johanna Drucker offers this summary:

“Where semiotics and phenomenology differ – and thus open the way towards two very distinct approaches to interpretation – is in the conception of the value of an object. Phenomenological apprehensions of an object is grounded in consciousness – in the operations by which the essence of a thing, experience, situation may be intuited. The semiotic approach denies the significant operation of individual consciousness, opting for a structure of the system as a basis for the production of value; and that value, in semiotic terms, is never essential, but always differential, namely, it is produced through relations of difference. The semiotic sign is never significant in itself or through substance, while the phenomenological is fundamentally essential, though only significant insofar as it appears in consciousness.” (17)

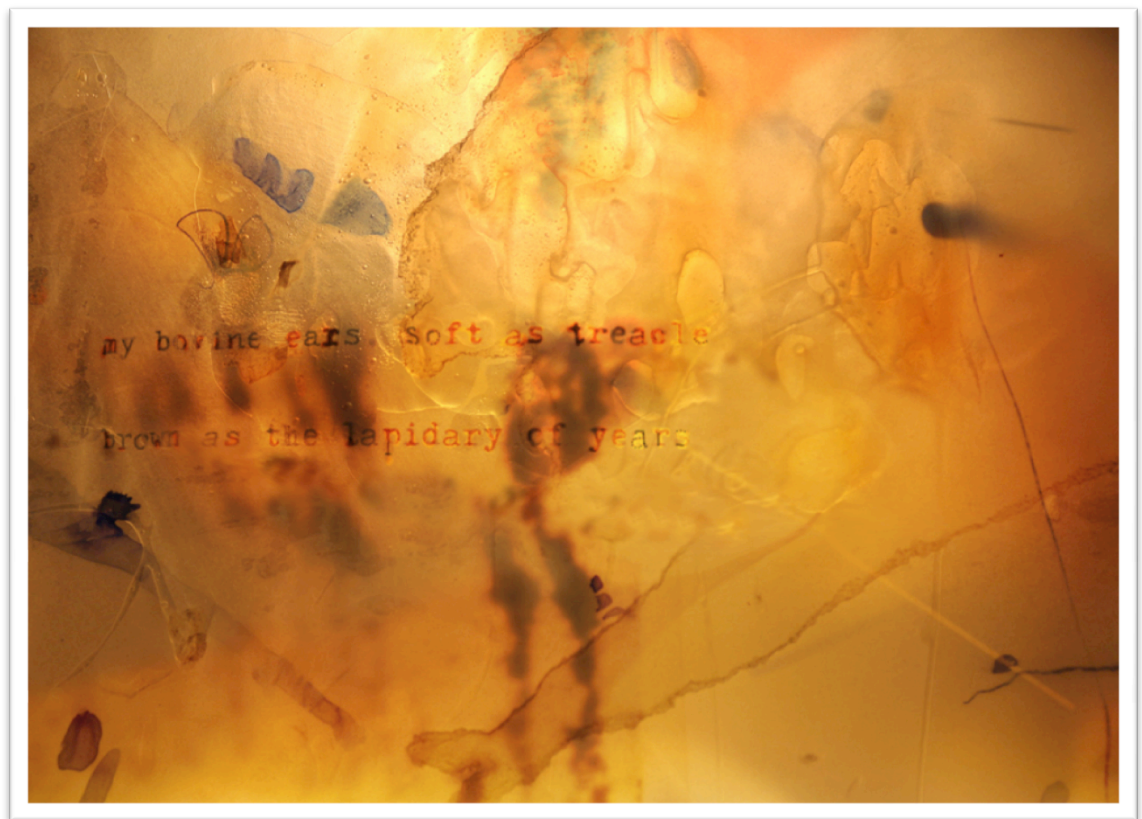
From Drucker’s perspective both Semiotics and Phenomenology fail to value matter as significant in itself, let alone text as valued matter.

## BOOKS MADE-UP

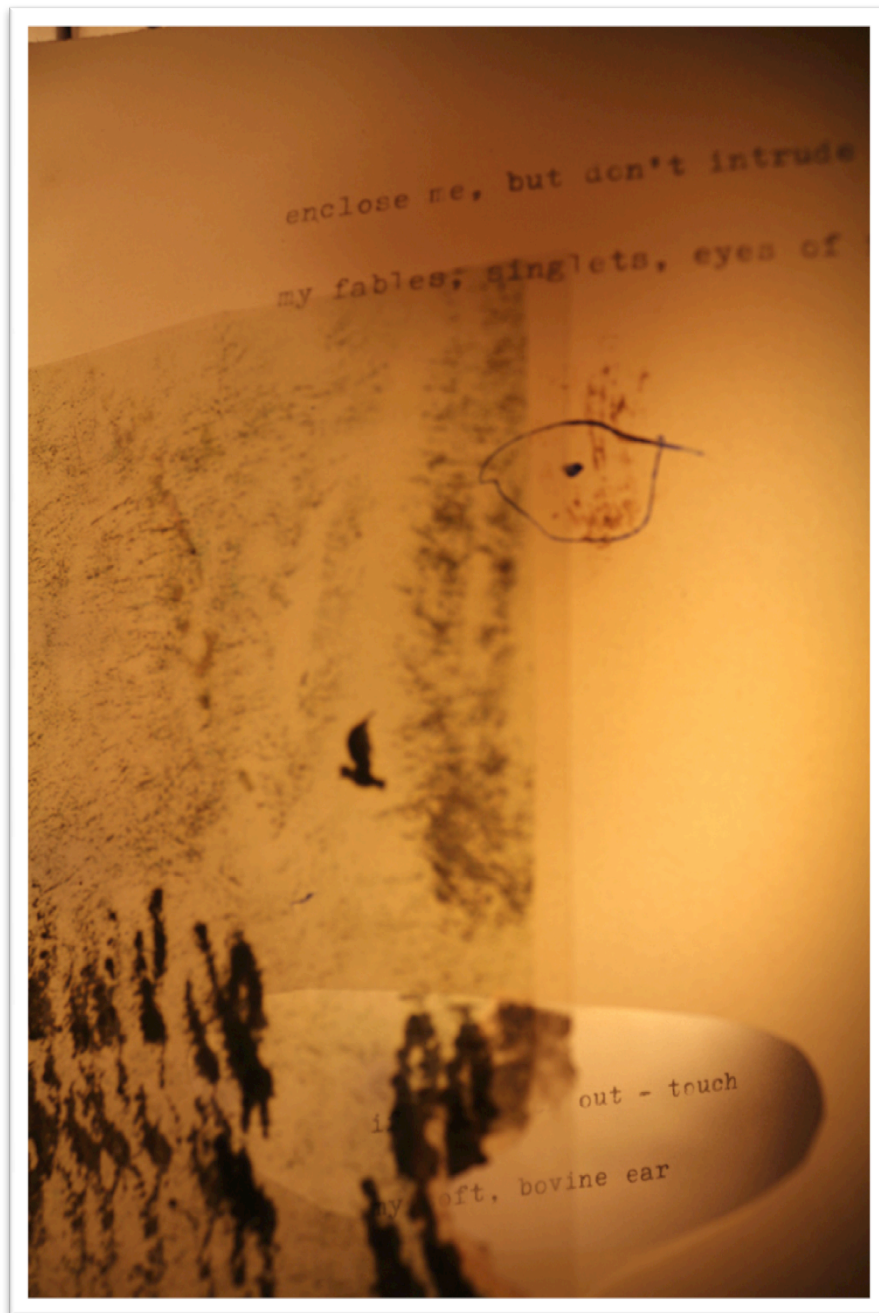
The idea of language and text as an extension of the body brought me back to making objects - in this case books - as a means to consolidate and advance my research progress.

Making books, as I now meant to, lies very much within the realm/genre of Artists' Books. Alex Selenitsch (artist, poet and a lecturer in architecture at the University of Melbourne) describes Artists' Books as "a book made by an artist, and is meant as an artwork." (18)

My initial steps into this next stage of my research were acts of 'sketching' with various papers, forms of printed lettering using a typewriter and rubber stamps, and additional materials, such as poured PVA glue, tapes and thread. The transparency of some of the paper supports initiated experiments with the dynamics between front and back lighting.







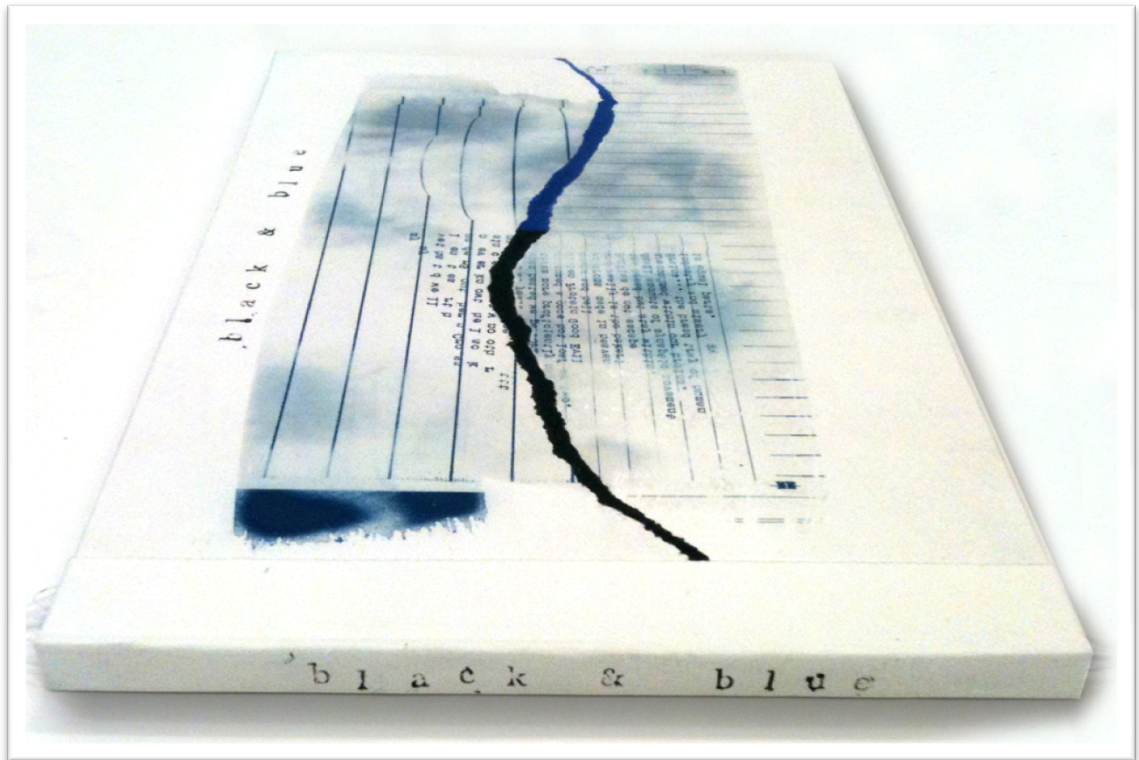
examples of Artists Book 'sketches' 2015

Over the course of my research thus far I felt I had established that the relationship between language and experience, perception and conception, was/is recursive. If I was to consider the symbolic realm of language and a state of experience as a totality, or unity, I would describe their Jekyll and Hyde relational behaviour as one or the other longingly gazing towards their other half for validation.

To place this idea into practice, I looked to the nature of the transparent surface I had been using in these book sketches (images above). These surfaces activated both sides of a page as equally viewable content, albeit within a reversible dynamic. When a transparent page overlaid an opaque page, the once split graphic content on each merged as one. As the space between the two page types closed and opened, optical dynamics were formed between the surfaces,



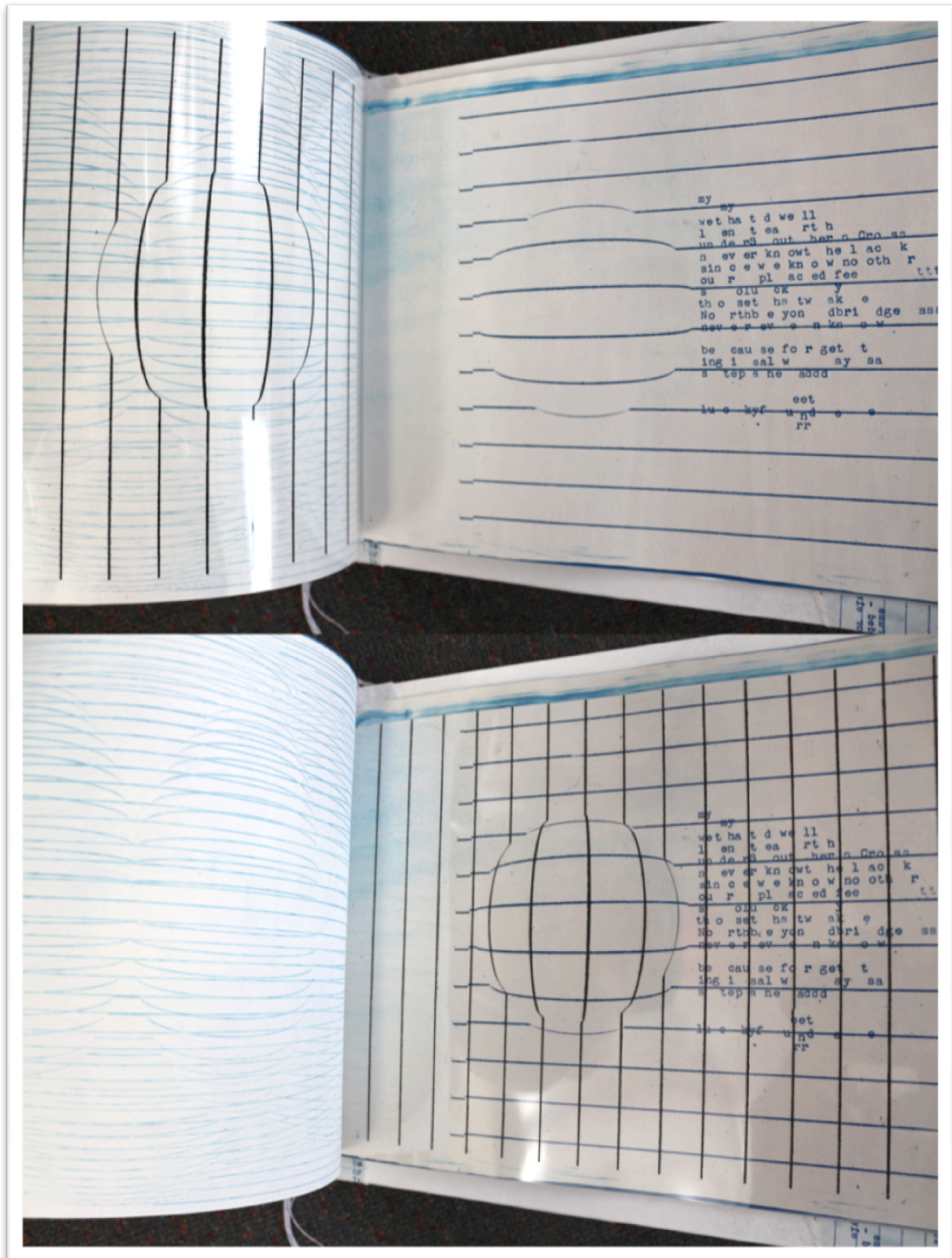
merging and separating graphic content while the shinier transparent overlay interacted with the matte paper below. The tactile difference as experienced by a reader turning the pages further distinguished the parts within a whole. The quality of transparency and/or opacity, distinctions of front and back, and various states of graphic overlays, all activated in different ways the sense that the transparency of information had a folding over and receding back from dynamic, which affected underlying experience and subsequent interpretations.



*Black & Blue* 2015

The result of these considerations was my Artists' Book, *Black & Blue*. In *Mass* and the etching suite *Theatre of the Word*, the language content had consistently focussed on instigating plays between a signifier and the signified. In *Black & Blue* I trialled a different approach, whereby I loosely appropriated and collaged together textual passages from books that claimed a certain authority of knowledge. By doing so I aimed to destabilise constructs made through the agency of language regarding cultural authority, assumptions of power, and knowledge as a 'true' or 'real' positivist position. The textual sources that I adapted passages from were; *The Book of Revelations*, a 1950s publication *The New Phonographic Phrase Book* for business, and a book aimed at secondary school level readers, *Understanding Science*. Once I had written the series of collaged 'poems', I transcribed them using my 1944 Olivetti typewriter. I then treated these written passages as visual elements in themselves, and after digitising them through scans, adjusted letter, word and line positions as a way of simultaneously manifesting and destabilising the language content therein. The line work that graphically accompanied these texts was adapted from the lines on school exercise book pages. These re-workings were made using Adobe Photoshop.

The image below shows two states of one of *Black & Blue*'s pages; firstly, with the acetate page up, and secondly with it down, overlaying the paper page below. Prominent in this example is the illusionistic activation of three-dimensions as the acetate page interrelates with the one below. The intent of such illusionistic spatial plays was to reveal the trick (of three-dimensions from two), whilst allowing the viewer/reader to enact its superficially convincing, mechanist performance. Thus, I hoped to create an additional visual/material/tactile component that further destabilised the already broken-down/mashed-up voices of authority from the original text sources mentioned.



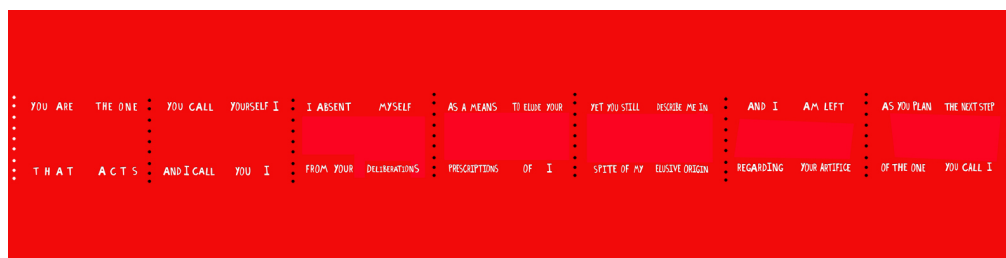
*Black & Blue* open

A significant aim of *Black & Blue* was to address and possibly subvert the performance of language in upholding conventions that establish hierarchical, cultural positions of power.

*Black & Blue* was so named as a play on the black ink graphics (on the acetate sheets), and the blue graphics (on the paper pages produced through the photographic Cyanotype printing process), and as an allusion to its colloquial connotation of bruising – an unwelcome result of a bad brush with authoritarian powers.

*Black & Blue*, once made, proved to be an interestingly different approach to addressing language and its effects. However, by straying from my focus of the relationship of a signifier to the signified, the clarity of the affective agency that a text form's materiality might enact was largely lost, even though *Black & Blue* utilised a range of visual and material qualities within its content. Part of this 'problem' was the way the longer text passages promoted semantic content to the fore. By doing so I lost the unpredictable and disturbing fibrillations that a more equal relationship of semantics and materiality (with all of its potential frictions), brought to this union.

Before coming back to this more equal, if sometimes troubled marriage, I tried out two more avenues of investigating words in spatial dimensions: the first involved a reduced adaption of one of *Black & Blue*'s poems, with the verses' content focusing on language as a force that constructs the 'I' within a life lived, but a construction resisted as too invasive and overly persistent. This poem was laid out in a 2000 pixels wide x 500 high digital file. When viewing this file through a virtual reality headset this size specification allowed a 360 wrap-around effect. To make this work graphically immersive, the left and right sides of the imagery within this file had to seamlessly mesh together. The continuous colour to the top and bottom of the image file filled the virtual spaces of 'sky' and 'ground' in red.

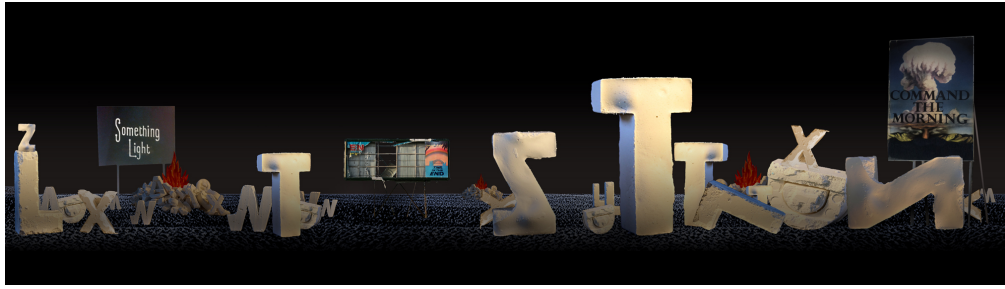


*You Are The One Who Acts 2015*

To experience this within virtual space, I sat, with the headset on and the image file loaded, on a chair that swivelled. This allowed me to turn in any direction and see/read different verses – the verses being arrayed to my front and back and sides. This proved to be very successful as an immersive experience of words in space, and as a test of virtual space as a metaphorical allusion to language's 'virtual', abstracted aspect.

I made a second image to investigate virtual space in a different way, with the text forms within having a visual, three-dimensional illusionistic appearance. Objects were also overlapped, creating an in-front/behind dynamic that furthered the illusion of receding space.

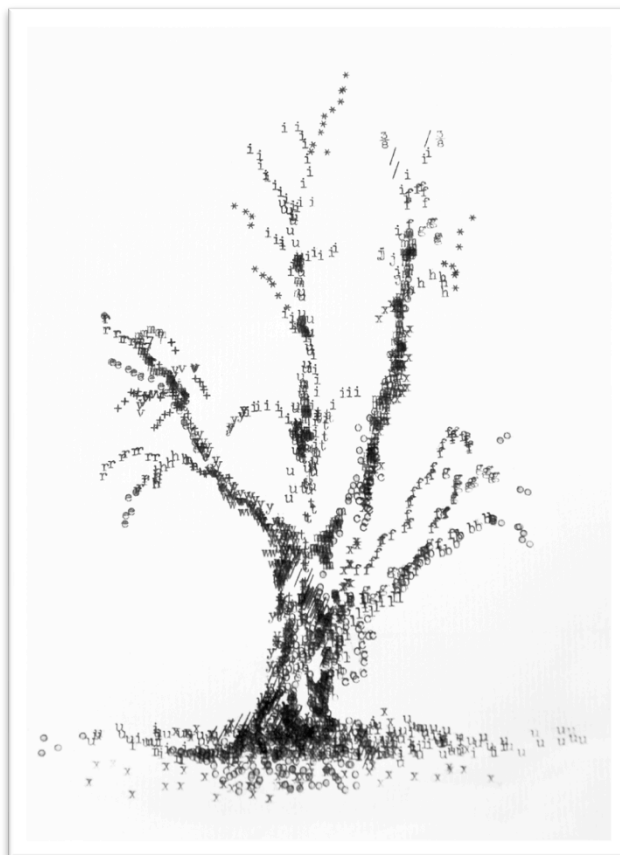




*Letter Rubble Landscape 2015*

This image convincingly ‘fooled’ my eye that the virtual space was three-dimensional and surrounded myself as viewer.

Secondly, on a different tangent, I wondered how letter forms, set free from being words with all of the following denotative work they were then required to perform, would behave as visual components when drawing representational objects; that is, performing through a very different modality? In consideration of the origins of the matter from which books are made, I carried my typewriter into an area with huge old River Red Gums, and to a mixture of curiosity and consternation experienced by the nearby sheep, cockatoos and galahs, I thwacked away. As a drawing tool the greyscale values of the amassed black ink deposits of the metal letters beating the typewriter’s ink saturated ribbon onto paper proved very adaptable to rendering in a generally recognisable way, a tree form. I drew six trees, one of which is on the following page.

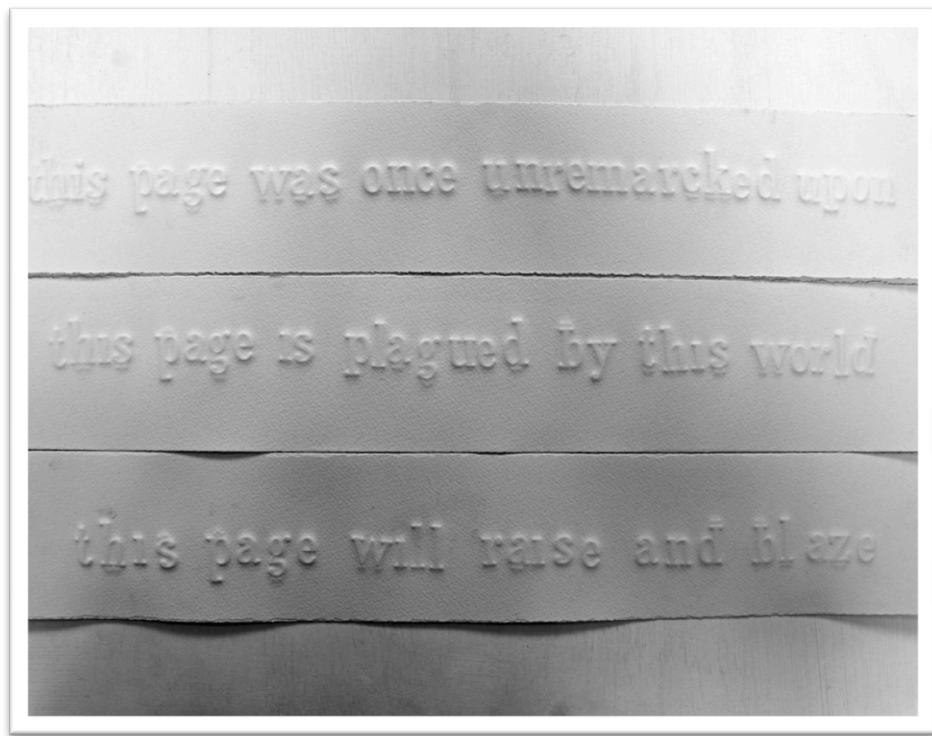


*typewriter drawing #1 2015*

The drawings were done on A5 sized paper – this allowed a relatively free movement of the paper within the typewriter whilst I ‘drew’. The image above was scanned at a high resolution, and printed via an ink-jet printer at 150cm high. This large print has dominated one wall of my studio, had a variety of media and forms stuck to it, but until recently, when the tree print turned upside-down, this avenue of enquiry had seemed to bear little fruit.

## A SENSE OF RELIEF

During the making of *Black & Blue* I also experimented with blind embossing (embossing paper without ink) on paper a series of text passages, composed by myself, that addressed language as a welcome/unwelcome constructor of identity.



*Un remarked 2015*

But it was when I reduced the quantity of words to a minimum, as in the image below, that the activation I sought between text’s materiality and semantics was balanced in such a way as to allow an oscillation of meaning between sign and form.



*I Am Paper No More 2015*



low relief letters on press-bed pre the embossing process, 2015

At this point, post *Black & Blue*, the *Type Trees*, and the embossing project, I felt that a careful balance between the textual states of sign signification and material form, or doing and being, was a key conceptual and formal dynamic on which my research could move forward in an optimal fashion.

## STEREO PLAYBACK

The presence of two and three-dimensional relationships in *Black and Blue* and the embossed paper works had, by different means, activated dimensional relationships as a means to observe different interactive aspects of text as sign and text as form.

The subtle spatial shifts and optical illusions between two and three-dimensional relationships evoked for me a metaphorical construct alluding to the faith required when mentally manifesting a signified object from the abstract sound or marks that composed a word.

This faith-based performative act, alike a magical evocation, became the focus of the following project using stereoscopic photography (19). I returned to my earlier methods of table top arrangements and sketching to allow emergent ideas regarding the actual content of this new project to arise.

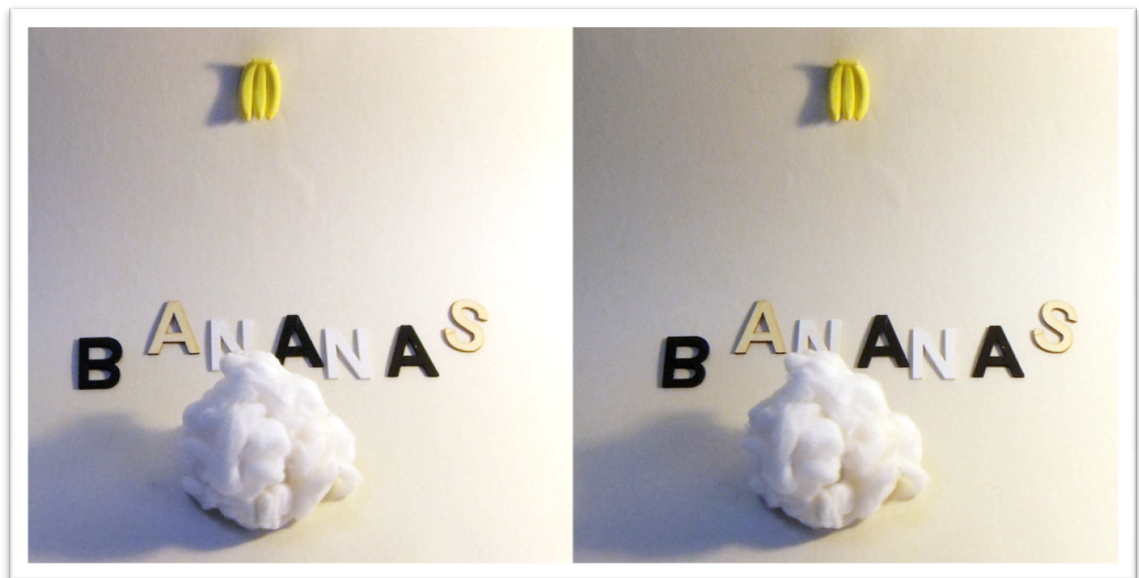
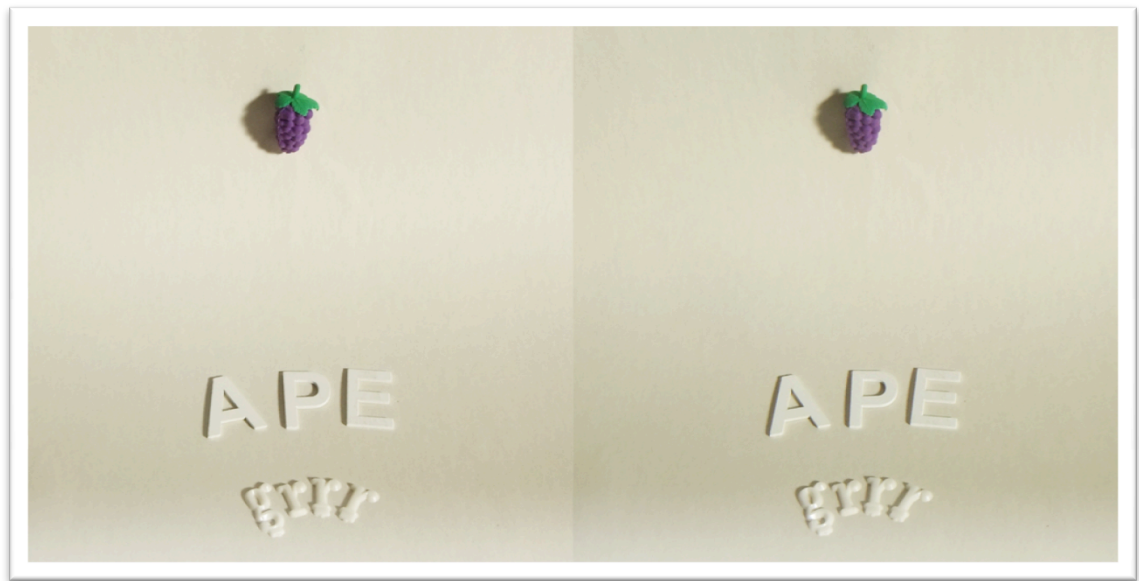
Technically, the key aspects to understand and manipulate in the process of making successful stereoscopic images, are the field of view and the plane of focus. Numerous trials were attempted till I became competent at working with the particular dynamics of this medium, and settled on a very stripped back visual method of presentation, with a single word play and one or two objects.

Importantly, for a person seeing both stereo photos on a table with the stereoscopic viewer placed over them, and then looking through the stereoscopic viewer and seeing a single image that optically appears to be three-dimensional, the mechanism of the trick is made obvious. I had invited this same experience (of a person's brain 'reading' visual content as one thing, while being fully aware of how they were being 'fooled' by a confluence of visual dynamics), in the optical illusions in *Black and Blue*, when the appearance of three-dimensional volume was conjured from the pages' two-dimensional content.

This 'revealing of the trick's mechanism' I deemed to be a very pertinent device that allowed me contextualise the communication through language within the realm of an illusionistic performance, performed by the speaker/writer and believed in by the hearer/reader.







stereoscopic images: *World, Grape, Bananas* 2015

To discuss in detail one of the stereo images I made: in the image directly above, the word bananas and a small bunch of rubber bananas are present. This is an obvious play of a signifier and its signified, with an additional aspect – the falsity of reality of the signified object (fabricated bananas). We are given both the word and its referent object, but the fabricated aspect proposes a question, ‘how fully should we believe in what is occurring?’ Meanwhile, the three letters in black spell the word ‘baa’. If baa is perceived, the ball of fluff takes on different connotations – can we now see a sheep-like form? Or is it meant to be a cloud? How crazy are we? Are we bananas? How far does one accept the/our game of believing in language as a conveyer of truth? Or, maybe a better question is; how much does our individual and collective sanity depend on believing in illusions?

~

Ever since the thickness of the printing ink in the first etching made in this project pushed insistently above the two dimensional surface of the paper, and throughout the following projects in a variety of manners, the voluminous spatial dimension of three had beckoned. To comprehend the full potentiality of materiality as a signifying agent I now needed to find, make and arrange three-dimensional text objects.

## CHAPTER 3: SPACE IS THE PLACE

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### TABLE TOPS

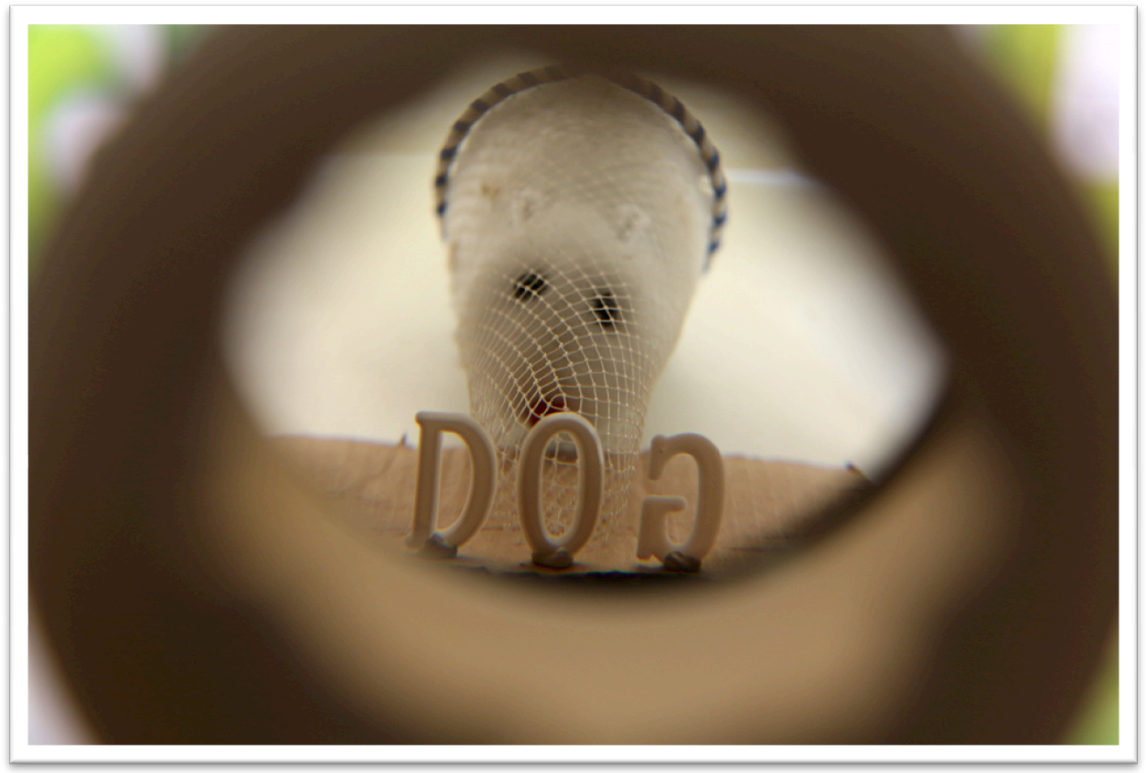
Concurrent to my accrual of pre-fabricated alphabets, I had also collected objects that had potential as players within my signifier/signified narratives. These were often models originally fabricated as ornaments or toys. Their size was generally equivalent to my found alphabets, and this factor suited the two-way narrative interchange of signification that I sought between words and things.

I arranged and rearranged relationships between the letters, words and objects.



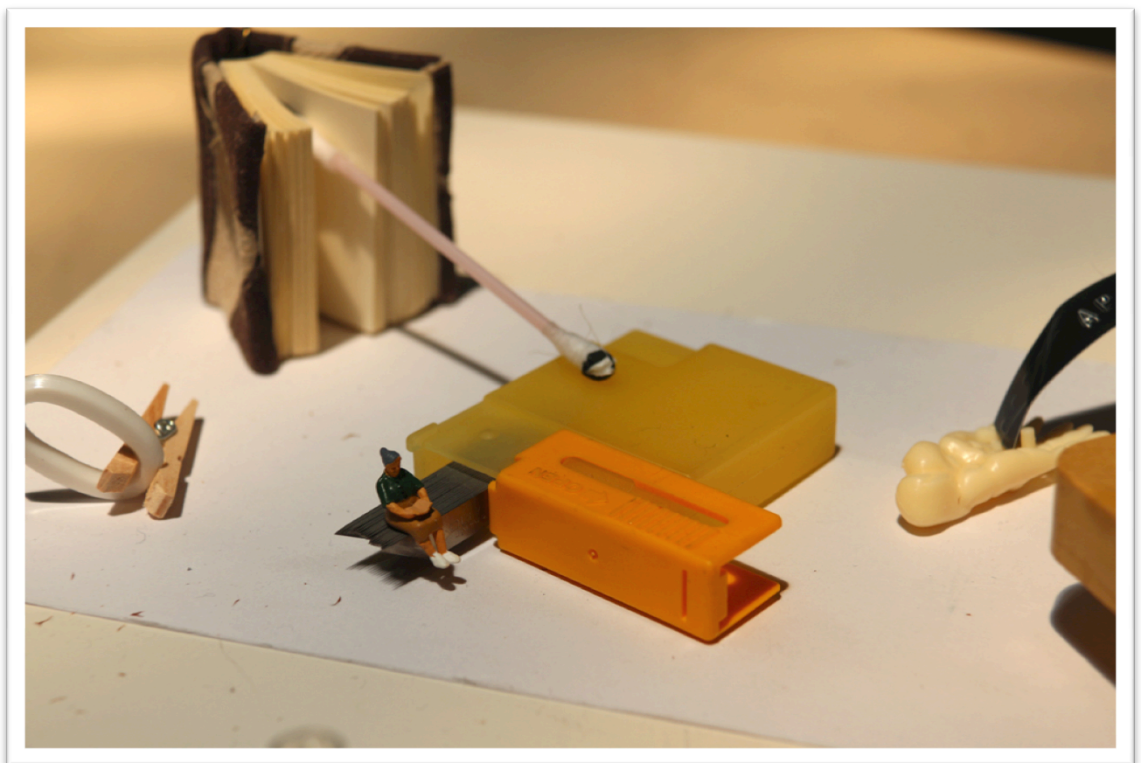




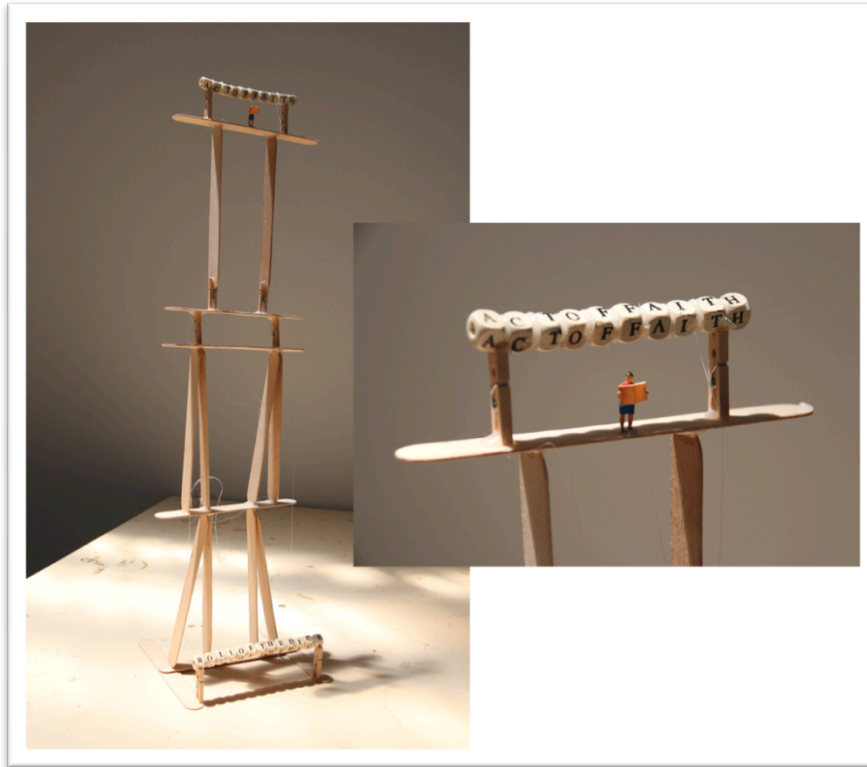












various table-top arrangements, 2016

The combination of ready-to-hand objects/letters and my accrued knowledge (from the previous two years of research focus) facilitated a seeming ease of arranging different juxtapositions and stage sets. A plethora of possibly resolved works were made and documented, then re-arranged into further set-ups. The problem now became settling on which particular arrangement amongst many best conveyed the essential themes I had been working with.

Concurrently, I had begun to try and imagine the School of Art gallery space in terms of which works I might select to exhibit and how they would be placed. Contemplating my table top arrangements, I saw how the rhythms of rhymes of their scale relationships and spatial activation could be used as a general model, translated and up-scaled into the dimensions within the gallery space.

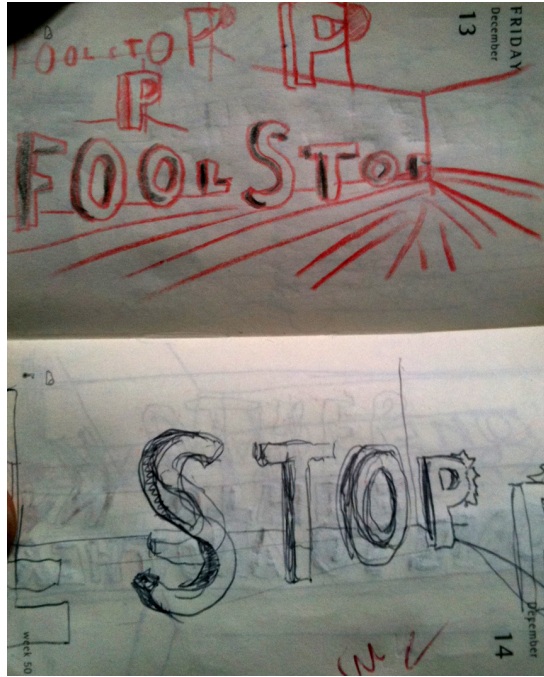
I had had a sense from early on that the gallery space and structure in itself was potentially a vital part of any installation that I performed within, especially as my project encompassed investigating materiality as signifying. Yet my exhibiting history up to this point had been within a traditional model of 2D works, often framed and hung at eye-level height on the walls. As a result, I had difficulty, even some initial resistance to, trying to imagine, let alone conceptualise quite what the gallery space *meant* in terms of the themes I had developed during my research. Visualising the gallery space as a smaller table-top work enlarged, allowed a break-through moment regarding how active the whole space could be.

This also brought the audience into the room, so to speak, and I began to consider how the positioning and scale of my works would affect a viewer's experience as they navigated the things and spaces between.

These new ideas would necessitate making text objects at a much larger scale than I had thus far.

## FLOORED BY FOUR WALLS

The initial piece I have made, to be specifically sited in the gallery with an active relation of scale to the gallery space, is *Fool Stop*. The gestation of this work began as part of a list of word plays on common grammatical forms, and was then conceptually developed as a sketch.



sketch for *Fool Stop* 2016

I made some small maquettes of the letters from light cardboard, and then sourced large cardboard boxes from bicycle shops as material to construct the resolved *Fool Stop* at a human-body scale. The signifying action of the two words will be enacted within the gallery, i.e. the final P of the word 'stop' will meet/crash into the gallery wall, partially disintegrating. From little fools big FOOLS grow.



*Fool Stop* painted cardboard, 165cm h x 35cm d x 900cm w, 2016

At this point my work enters into a full (fool) blown relationship with Concrete Poetry. Concrete Poetry (20) utilises the materiality of a made word 'poem' as a marker and maker of meaning, and by doing so evokes responses to a work in ways outside of language's symbolic domain.

During this project I had been documenting local examples of a street-made vernacular of words in-situ. At this 'concrete' stage they have become valuable reference points.

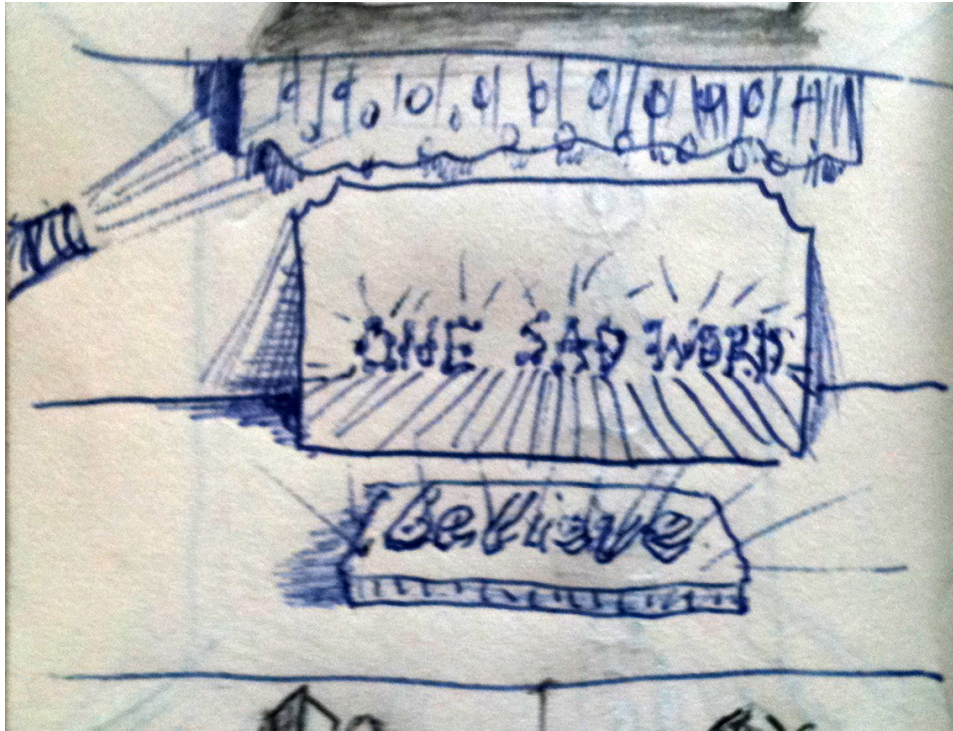


street examples of text sign and form relationships 2014,15,16

The planned larger works are further developed through enlargement and/or combination, selected ideas from my sketches, photos, or from my table-top arrangements.







sketches of planned works 2016

Materials have been collected for works to be constructed, small scale maquettes have been trialled, and a near to-scale gallery floor plan has been drafted. One of these recent space adaptable works, *Etc*, was installed in the RMIT Gallery as part of the exhibition *Out of the Matrix* in May 2016.



*Etc* found objects, variable dimensions, 2016

## GROUNDing

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### Background

Using signs and self-reflexive consciousness have a chicken and egg-like relationship; which came first? If we didn't have language/symbols as the medium through which self-reflection can occur, then could consciousness be self-reflective? If we didn't have self-reflective consciousness, how could we conceptualise signs? Maybe it is best to say they mutually arose at the point of fledgling self-awareness - but the moment that both became active is the point at which perception and conception began their curiously entangled, recursive engagement with each other.

In evolutionary terms, the human brain, with its mysterious self-reflectivity, has developed a hemispherical split that allots different brain functions to left and right frontal lobes for the processing of stimuli. The 'left brain' has a bias towards the rational and language use, and the 'right brain' processes images and is the primary site of intuitive thinking. Making the materiality of text a significant factor, more than something simply to be read, is a means of rubbing together brain functions that are evolutionarily partitioned, albeit with 200 million neurons actively connecting the left and right hemispheres.

The artefacts I am creating as my research practice are like propositions that inhabit states that may oscillate; the different modes that instigate this oscillation are language and image. A viewer, confronted by these different considerations of text as language and text as a thing, is therefore required to engage in a different and non-habitual 'reading' of a word. The frictions and fictions created by such an unconventional and possibly uncomfortable collision of disparate brain function is a means to not only upturning conventions of sign use, but to also propose novel combinations and considerations of how perception and conception intertwine.

### Foreground

"Words are not (except in their own little corner) facts or things: we need therefore to prise them off the world, to hold them apart from and against it, so that we can realise their inadequacies and arbitrariness, and can relook at the world without blinkers." (20)

Language philosopher J.L. Austin, in the above passage, poses an unusual challenge – to prise words off the world. He suggests that this is necessary as words act to blinker our perception of the world. To achieve his aims Austin applied a methodology that examined the roots of a word and its usage in everyday conversation. Through this analysis he logically ascertained a precise meaning and therefore proper application for a word. Interestingly, in the quote above, he also evokes a 'little corner' where words may be 'things', but as a form



of dismissal by which to contrast and therefore confirm the validity of his chosen approach.

Austin's concerns are very similar to mine, however, my approach to prising words 'off the world' seeks to look into the very place he rejects. By claiming a word as a thing, and thereby apprehending its position in its 'little corner', I aim to reveal space between the word and the world, re-examining not only a word's 'inadequacies and arbitrariness' as Austin puts it, but also its (adequate) matter of fact-ness.

Austin also suggests that words can not only be true, false, and meaningless, but also performative (21). This concept of words having a performative nature seems instinctively right – the arbitrary, contrived nature of the sounds and signs that make up language and text, which must be acted out (spoken/heard, written/read) to do their intended work, is inherently theatrical.

My project's visualised inter-relations between semiotic sign functions, their semantic content, their materiality, and other players (both 'caused' to be present by textual signifying, or simply present as witness/participants), breeds an Absurdist theatre of unlikely, shifting contextual relationships.

By translating the content of my art works through processes that utilise analogue and digital technology, what is real, what is illusion, what has semiotic propulsion and what exists as significant matter, can be activated in diverse ways to form contextual loops of increasing complexity. By these means my research project poses new considerations into the processes of constructing meaning.

*A letter's body stands  
confronting its own small stature  
lacking in alliteration  
education and motivation  
to be  
words, lines... a story  
Distant as nirvana*

*Bored of imposed notions  
of self and serif  
this letter becomes involved  
with Another – joining at the flank  
elbow throat, ditching preconceptions  
they become  
Unrecognisable (22)*

## HOLDING~HANDS

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A number of contemporary artists are engaged in activating movement between the semiotic function of text and its real and illusory material state.

William Kentridge, in his work *I Am Not He, the Horse is Not Mine*, as seen in London's Tate Gallery in early 2013, was presented via an 8 channel video work, with each video on a continuous loop. Together the videos form a non-linear narrative arc that spans the birth and demise of the Russian modernist avant-garde. In this work Kentridge utilises collage to combine a number of key forms; text (in English) with fonts that stylistically reference Constructivism; the formal arrangement of text in space that appropriates constructivist compositional structures; text that uses the Cyrillic alphabet; and torn paper loosely arranged to form characters and props. His use of text as simultaneously semantic sign, narrative object, and as historical marker, makes reference to a specific political and historical era, while concurrently instigating cohesions and frictions between orders of knowing and being, the real and the symbolic.

In contrast to Kentridge's collage aesthetic, my etchings and animations are visually constructed through one-point perspective combined with a consistent light origin and tonal contrasts. These formal dynamics act to cohere the players within their environments. This sense of a unified world enables me to propose to the viewer that text-based things and other things believably inhabit the same world, and further, that text's role as a language sign is viable even when it can be simultaneously playing a material part in that world.

Kentridge's work often focuses on societal hierarchies of power, whether in South Africa or beyond. Discussing his work "I Am Not He, the Horse is Not Mine", he says:

*"I Am Not He, the Horse is Not Mine* is an elegy (perhaps loud for an elegy) both for the formal artistic language that was crushed in the 1930s and for the possibilities of human transformation that so many hoped for and believed in during the revolution." (23)

His personal history growing up as the son of an anti-apartheid lawyer in an apartheid South Africa is formative in his awareness and focus on hierarchies, both in terms of societal constructs and within the symbolic realm. My research focus on the materiality of text also utilises the Absurd as a means to reposition conventional orderings. Unlike Kentridge I do not address specific political/historic subject matter, rather, the narratives in my work originate from intuited ideas that have a kinship to dream-like narratives, allowing the ambiguous and the paradoxical to co-exist.

Kentridge's works often have a strong sense of Absurdism, sometimes directly referencing or adapting works that are part of an Absurdist lineage, such as Nicolai Gogol's novel *The Nose* (1836), Alfred Jarry's play *Ubu Roi*, adapted by Kentridge into the animated work *Ubu Tells the Truth* (1997), or Kentridge's illusionistic appropriations from the early experimental films of Georges Melies in *7 Fragments for George Melies* (2003). Speaking about his adaption of Gogol's book into an opera, also titled *The Nose* (2010), Kentridge says;

"I don't see *The Nose* as a parable for our time, except in its form or its principles, which have to do with learning from the absurd. It's a story about the terrors of hierarchy. That's not a specifically South African phenomenon. At the moment, I think it applies everywhere." (24)

What I take from his comment 'learning from the absurd' is an acknowledgement of an Absurd viewpoint's upending of conventions, thereby

revealing a state of affairs that although legitimised and normalised by societal laws and customs, are never the less preposterous. I will address my own use of the Absurd in more detail under the Methodology section below.

My research making has slowly evolved from working on flat surfaces, to low relief works, forming optical illusions of three-dimensions from two, and on into room sized, fabricated text works that are aligned with developments in visual, or concrete poetry. These 3D works resonate with Martin Creed's *Mothers* (2011), which I find to be an exemplarily, contemporary example of words specifically made to inhabit interior spaces. In this work the word MOTHERS is placed on a rotating steel armature that spins above the heads the spectators, almost touching the roof and scraping the walls of the gallery. There is something magnificently absurd at *work* in this work, with the word's monumental materiality and animation destabilising and multiplying significations while simultaneously almost physically threatening the space and the audience.

Santiago Sierra's 2010–2012 work, *Destroyed World*, is another pertinent example of contemporary concrete poetry. Sierra built capital letters on a monumental scale in locations around the world using materials pertinent to local histories – the letters (eventually) spelt KAPATILSM. Each letter was in turn destroyed by applying elemental or mechanical forces that served, by their specific relationship to relevant historical issues, to further contextualise the creation and destruction of a letter within the local/national situation. Sierra's attention to how the materiality of a language sign forms an action of signification that can operate simultaneously to its semantic denotation, aligns his methods with a key aspect in my own project.

A precursor of Sierra's monumental letters can be found in the work 'Victory Over Death 2', painted in 1970, by the New Zealand artist Colin McCahon (1919–1987). In this large work, measuring 208cm high x 598cm wide, the words AM I – I AM are presented larger than almost any human body that may stand before them. These words both quote and rearrange God's reply to Moses in the Bible's book of Exodus. The scale and style in which McCahon presents (maybe even creates a material incarnation of) God's utterance, communicates phenomenological aspects pertaining to an omnipresent being addressing an earthly subject through the medium of language. A key visual aspect of this work is the initial AM I (if read from left to right) being painted in black on a black background. These words then only become apparent to a viewer when they stand on such a angle to the work so as to reveal the words as light refracting from the differing surface qualities of the paint on canvas. Light becomes then both literal vehicle and figurative medium of revelation. Thus the illuminated whites and greys that shape the words I AM (and somewhat distressingly {in terms of any absolute state of knowing} fade from brilliant white on the left to a mottled grey on the right) are posited recursively alongside the doubting question, AM I? Hence the ground we existentially stand on is suggested as one always in transition between unsettled state of unknowing and a sure place of knowing – doubt and faith. Maybe then, a way that I/we may locate ourselves 'somewhere' (a somewhere that I characterise as providing stable ground for being properly present in and belonging to this world) is made possible through an encompassing, in-the-moment feeling composed of emotional and spiritual receptivity.

In contrast to Kentridge's and Sierra's attention to social and political issues, and McCahon's spiritual questioning and appropriation of religious texts, my approach to narrative dynamics (intertwining text and other characters) has

some kinship to key aspects of Francisco Goya's (1746-1828) two etching series - *The Disparates* and *Los Caprichos*. In both of these series of etchings Goya utilised allegory and a sense of the fantastic to inflect his narratives with dream-like strangeness and intensity. Roger Malbert observes:

"...(an) atmosphere of menace and diabolical, or comic, confusion pervades the prints. Darkness is an overwhelming influence – the black of night." (25)

My *Theatre of the Word* etchings, which also provide the source for imagery and themes in my animation *Mass*, are set in a netherworld characterised by a low horizon that intensifies the black, dominating expanse of a sky.

The etching process of aquatint lends itself to producing closely pitted ink receptacles in the copper matrix, and when filled with the oily printers' ink and run through the printing press, produces a uniquely infused, almost fathomless, blackness. This Blackness evokes an atmosphere that pervades the narrative content within the *Theatre of the Word* etchings. It is interesting in this regard to look to how black is used in Baroque painting.

"Such darkness is a value active both artistically and psychologically and is indispensable for displaying various possibilities of light and for introducing an element of mystery, ambiguity, and understatement. The contrast with darkness lends to the light a dynamic quality and brings in the element of drama and pathos." (26)

It is in these qualities mentioned in the two quotes above – a certain strain of black humour and the manner by which a dark atmosphere can imbue a sense of ambiguous physical and psychic states within a visual work – employed in combination with a carnivalesque play of animal/human/textual absurdity, become traits that connect my *Theatre of the Word* etchings and my animation *Mass* to the formal qualities and narrative aspects found within Goya's etchings.

This active 'blackness' makes a contemporary appearance in the text-based works by the American artist Glenn Ligon (b.1960). In a series of works begun in 2008, Ligon uses acrylic paint, coal dust, gesso, oil stick, applied onto canvas through stencils and silkscreen. By these means he 'writes' quotes from a variety of select literary sources. Black is the only colour used, though the qualities of each medium inflect their own blackness in unique ways. The resultant works are highly textured, with words overlaying other words, the topmost layer only readable by viewing from an oblique angle so as to catch a slight difference in the nuances of different textures and refractory qualities of the mediums used. Before deciphering the semantic content, the initial impression caused by the works' materiality is funerary, tinged by a slightly absurd awareness of the near illegibility of the text passages.

This connection of the veracity of language to history and knowledge, is approached through particular means by the Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986). Writing about the work of Borges, John Sturrock says:

"Fiction, as he practices it himself, is a very evident exercise in generalisation and so reinforces the power of language to dissociate us from reality" (27)

Borges' work, in some respects, uses this self-consciously fictional fiction to prise (with the intent that J.L. Austin uses the phrase) words away from the world.

What Borges reveals through the chink of exposed light however is not the/a real world, but our minds, contorted inextricably with language, describing to themselves that they are seeing the real world.

At the end of Borges' short story *Everything and Nothing* the main character, "either before or after dying", finds himself in the presence of God and asks;

"I who have been so many men in vain want to be one and myself. The voice of the Lord answered in a whirlwind: 'Neither am I anyone; I have dreamt the world as you dreamt your work, my Shakespeare, and among the forms in my dream are you, who like myself are many and no one.'" (28)

In this passage a human self, an omnipresent being, literature and the dream meet, with any part being part of another part, in a play/story/life/dream/primordial stream of consciousness, which simultaneously forms and un-forms in the insubstantiality of space and time.

Reflecting back towards my project, with the above passage hovering around and casting an ambiguous light, reveals, or at least tints, the hall of mirrors my research is exploring. When the arbitrary and insubstantiality of signs become matter, and therefore an affective, signifying agent in the world (or the world of the artwork), the real and the illusory intermingle across and through sign systems and orders of being.

"Borges, as a maker of fictions, has made material objects – books – out of his immaterial speculations. The mirror, which represents the objects in the world, is itself an object in the world. Once they have acquired this real, durable form, an author's 'intellectual exercises' become a factor in the intellectual experience of whoever reads them. They are, in a double sense, an imposition: a product of the printing press and a make-believe. And as real objects they also enter into an unimaginably complex system of cause and effects of which history consists." (28)

Borges is recorded as saying "The original is unfaithful to the translation", which, as he was a prolific translator, could be taken, with a nod to a slightly ironic about-face logic, at face value, i.e. that no translation is the same as the original – even that the translation can become a real, maybe better version, and the original now trails behind. Or, as I like to read it, again with a sense of Borges' irony at play, as literature interpreting the world through both language and imagination to become, as a translation, more real than the world; a world that isn't quite as interesting or reliable as the solidity of and within books.

Sturrock again:

"Borges is not in the least sceptical of the human mind, only its medium, language, whose co-ordination with reality, which is not verbal, he rightly finds unconvincing". (29)

This brings me back around to the abstractedly slippery, recursive relationship of signs to their real world referents. My research focus on sign systems is a (momentary) culmination of my history as a visual artist engaged with making visual signs, whether they are of a representational, indexical or symbolic



nature. Language, and its visual code text, become a vehicle for me to look at the wondrous yet problematic nature of using arranged marks as signs.

In terms of writing, a different category of shifting and ambiguous textual states is described by Norman Bryson when discussing the very different writing modes, or voices, adopted by the 18<sup>th</sup> Century writer, art critic, and philosopher, Denis Diderot:

“... because besides this magician who manages to write as though language were purely fenestral, there is another Diderot, for whom language, like all other forms of the sign, is *opaque*, not relay but independent producer of meaning, not reflector but autonomous generator of signification.” (30)

Bryson highlights key concepts that underlie my project, even though they are formulated from a different tangent – how language use can either reflect conceptions, or, through stylistic tropes, generate ‘meaning’ that operates on a level separate from the semantic content. In this case, the use of stylistics within Diderot’s writing becomes a kind of equivalence to my project’s employment of materiality as “an autonomous generator of signification”.

Post-Structuralism focused in on Saussure’s concept of language signs as containing a signifier and signified, positing that the signified is itself a signifier, that this transference is therefore never stable, and even that the signifier never successfully transcends itself to reach the signified (as the transcendental assumption of an a priori ‘being’ was never actually there). Strong emphasis was also placed on intertextuality between author/reader/other texts/and social and historical factors. A Post-Structuralist point of view severely undermined Saussure’s hope that Semiology could become a science for investigating sign use in fields beyond language.

These Post-Structuralist ideas, though not applied to my project in a positivist sense (if that is even possible considering the almost vaporous fluidity at their heart), are present in such works as the animation *Mass*. In *Mass* words are material things, or players, that instigate events with equal facility, through *being*, to other players. Thus, the clarity enabled by agreed conventions of order that make understood connections between the symbolic and the real, become blurred, and movement from the signifier and the signified becomes a recursive loop as opposed to a linear transaction. In *Mass*, the signifying, materiality of a sign, in combination with its status as a player equal amongst others, sets off increasingly destabilised (in terms of ‘normal’ sign relationships) narrative cause and effect events.

Recent theoretical thinking such as New Materialism tussles with metaphysical ideas regarding how far consciousness extends into inanimate objects and the signifying effects of matter itself:

“New Materialism has distinguished itself from historical materialism, structuralism, and semiology by reengaging phenomenology (both the embodied phenomenology of Henri Bergson as well as the materialist phenomenology of Walter Benjamin) by focusing on material culture and drawing attention to a materiality of the signifier, now understood as the signifying effects of matter itself.” (31)

In retrospect, the *work* of the content within the artefacts made throughout my research has largely focussed on this very area – the signifying effects of matter.

Doing so has enabled me to examine text as a communicative medium that is profoundly of matter, and matter that matters. Redirecting roles, reversing functions and condensing idea into matter, allowed my re-examination of the gap or void that hovers between a sign signifying and its referent object, inviting an attempt to crossover. This has heightened my awareness of the difference between present in the *now*, and my disconnection from the *now* due to a mental investment in the abstracted nature of signs and symbols So, how to navigate between and relate together these two humanly fundamental states of knowing and being? My conclusion is that I must be aware of the paradox between these states of mind. My act of defining an experience dislocates me from an in the body/in the world awareness of the moment now, yet, as all is of the one '?', this dislocation never wholly removes me from being in the world and of the Earth.

I attempt to open up these ideas to an audience through aspects present in the artefacts I've made.

New Materialist, Karen Barad says:

"It is difficult to see the diffraction patterns—the patterns of difference that make a difference—when the cordoning off of concerns into separate domains elides the resonances and dissonances that make up diffraction patterns that make the entanglements visible." (32)

I identify this idea, or action of *entanglement*, as my main means of opening up and making present key ideas, both for myself as researcher, and for a potential audience.



In the image above the signifying action of the word Tiger has made present its referent object. Also 'on stage' is a large mirror that reflects, but distorts the 'truth' of the reflection, and the holder of the mirror, who is also possibly the referent object of the distorted text signifier. Both of the referent objects, or characters, wear masks, one wears a mask derived from the other, and the other a mask of itself – the entanglements in this work are multiple, and the diffraction patterns are found in the contemplation of contextual relationships that occur as real and symbolic boundaries blur and domains of order swap.

By recognising and manifesting within my art works the signifying agency of the materiality of the signifier, and bringing to bear an Absurdist dismantling of

hierarchical positions, such as sign and form, human and non-human, and animate and inanimate, entangling narratives have been manifested.

## UNDER STANDING

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### Overview

My primary methodological approach adopts a Practice-based research approach that proceeds through a reflexive process of making, reading, thinking and writing.

Linda Candy describes this approach thus:

“Practice-based Research is an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice. Whilst the significance and context of the claims are described in words, a full understanding can only be obtained with direct reference to the outcomes.” (33)

This concept of research forms a holistic system that requires dynamic interchanges between modes of thinking and means of making.

Underneath this umbrella stands a combination of methodologies unique to this project’s field of enquiry. I have found that my considerations of such a complex and multivalent topic as textual states required a research approach that is composed of a variety of methodologies. These are; Absurdism, Print-based production, the Theatrical as metaphor for words’ performativity, and New Materialism’s idea of Entanglement.

### Four Combined Methodological Approaches

#### 1. *Breaking and Making and the Absurd*

Albert Camus (1913-1960) conceived of an existentially tinged philosophy of the Absurd in his book *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

“Belief in the meaning of life always implies a scale of values, a choice, our preferences. Belief in the absurd, according to our definitions, teaches the contrary.”  
(34)

Camus's Absurdism is nihilistic, but it is a nihilism that finds great energy from the acceptance that freedom is impossible and there is no future to believe in.

"Thus the absurd man *realizes* that he *was* not really free. To speak clearly, to the extent to which I hope, to which I worry about a truth that might be individual to me, about a way of being or creating, to the extent to which I arrange my life and prove therefore that I accept it having a meaning, I create for myself barriers between which I confine my life." (35)

Pertinent to my take on, or use of the Absurd to approach my research questions, is a contrary question – that is, what meaning am I trying to form (believe in) by questioning how meaning is derived? I have no answer to this except that it displays my own entanglement and lack of freedom from the experiential and its reflection in the mirror maze of signs. In this regard the Absurd of Camus neatly describes my own personal, let alone research, plight.

Yet the Absurd as a 20<sup>th</sup> Century construction doesn't do justice to the spirit that pervades a historical lineage of absurdity that inhabits slap-stick, jesting, and the carnivalesque, or the thread that runs through the fictional writing of authors such as Alfred Jarry, Franz Kafka, Machado De Assis, Nikolai Gogol, E.T.A. Hoffman, Laurence Sterne, Cervantes, Rabelais, and Apuleius.

This history is inclusive of an Absurdist tendency to apply a topsy-turvy mirror to conventional structures, whether they have a language origin, a bureaucratic nature, or are invested in personally held beliefs. Regarding the carnivalesque as a form defined by Mikhail Bakhtin, Andrew Robinson comments:

"It is a type of performance, but this performance is communal, with no boundary between performers and audience. It creates a situation in which diverse voices are heard and interact, breaking down conventions and enabling genuine dialogue. It creates the chance for a new perspective and a new order of things, by showing the relative nature of all that exists." (36)

An Absurdist focus on the power of words is found in the legendary German character, Til Eulenspiegel. Written by an unknown author in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, Eulenspiegel's exploits episodically inhabit a range of situations. Paul Oppenheimer, in his introduction to the collected stories of Til Eulenspiegel says:

"Eulenspiegel steps before his audience as both a humanist and a modern linguistic philosopher. His passion is to explore the mechanisms of psychological and what may be termed assertional language. He yearns for information that may be trusted. The trouble, from Eulenspiegel's point of view, is that the reality of most speech, and most literature, is psychological rather than being informational." (37)

Assertional speech that seeks to convey psychological overtones to semantic content parallels the part played by the materiality of the sign in my research. To clarify this point, I earlier quoted a passage of Norman Bryson's, regarding how Diderot used language from both 'opaque' and 'fenestral' positions. From this understanding, psychological 'tone' is an embodied, physically uttered/inflected aspect of materiality that can effect meaning. Assertional language seeks to insert itself between the signifier and the signified response

by colouring the signifier, diverting its conventional 'pointing at' for reasons specific to the speaker's intent. Eulenspiegel's role-playing as a fool who falls for the unqualified, normative meaning of the spoken word, too 'dumb' to hear the assertional overtones, endears himself to my conceptualisations and the narrative situations proposed in my work.

Regarding the problematic relationship of language (as structured, logical sign system) to assertional (the non-logical effects of voice-tone materiality) language usage, Oppenheimer states:

"The dilemma is incapable of resolution, except for the provisional resolution of continuously remaining sensitive to its existence. That is what Eulenspiegel manages to be. A great deal of Eulenspiegel's life is spent revealing the nature of the linguistic trap in which everyone thrives, fails, flourishes, struggles, and occasional thrashes about. His life also reveals ways of being free from the trap... by meeting it with clear, often humour-filled thinking." (38)

## 2. *Theatrically Hoodwinked*

Discussing Jose Luis Borges' fascination with the aptitude of a word to reference a specific individual thing, then, without even changing into a form of pluralisation, the same word also referencing the entire group that the thing belongs to, John Sturrock comments:

"...removing 'them' from the real world of time and decadence into the ideal world of eternity. This magical transposition is achieved simply enough by naming a real thing, by exchanging objects for word." (39)

If the signifying agency of a sign is already one form of conjuring, this conceptual transposition from the transient to the eternal bestows a different order of magical power to words. Yet there is still a third, even higher degree of magic that words evoke. Near the end of his book 'Borges' Short Stories' Rex Butler observes:

"Rather, we might say that for Borges a text lives on because it embodies and speaks of that *nothingness that is universal*. And it is this nothingness that Borges himself... tried to make his subject." (40)

The third and highest power of language, words, and text is *not* to make something from nothing, rather, their power is to be able to contain the conceptualisation of such a fantastical act.

In light of these magical powers of words to evoke, my use of visualised, theatrical staging of narrative situations forms a methodological construct that, by 'playing out', can examine this aspect of word potentiality.

## 3. *Rolling the ground then crossing the line*



My use of printmaking processes is a means by which I invest the subject of my research enquiry into the methods of by which I conduct my research.

On primary technical and instrumental levels my use of printmaking as the originating site of producing much of my project's visual content aligns the making of this project's artefacts within traditions, techniques and materials of a post-Gutenberg historical lineage of text and book production. Elizabeth Eisenstein states:

"When ideas are detached from the media used to transmit them, they are also cut off from the historical circumstances that shape them, and it becomes difficult to perceive the changing context within which they must be viewed." (41)

I also connect printmaking, as a pertinent methodological approach to my area of research enquiry, from a different tangent. The act of printing (the exchange of information originating from the artist's conception, translation into the printing matrix and then to the receptive surface) can be considered as an analogous process to language use (a subject's experience, conception of such into language, and reception by a second subject as receptor).

This conception of analogous processes between printmaking and language use can be extended even further through a consideration of ideas of presence and absence. Discussing print media, Clare Humphries says:

"... the semiotic structure of analogue representation engages an interchange between presence and absence. The impression can never bring the viewer into contact with the reality that produced it (the printmaking block) and thus the print is always incomplete, pointing beyond itself to something that is missing." (42)

Words too point at something beyond themselves, the absent object of reference.

On a more material level, the advent in the West of the printing press being used in conjunction with movable type, oil based inks and industrial paper manufacture, shifted relationships between text and images and text as image profoundly. Elizabeth Eisenstein states:

"The fact that letters, numbers, and pictures were all alike subject to repeatability by the end of the fifteenth century needs more emphasis. That the printed book made possible new forms of interplay between these diverse elements is perhaps even more significant than the change undergone by picture, number, or letter alone." (43)

Developments in technology alter existing paradigms of text and image relationships. Within each new advancement's shadow hides its predecessor. Digital printing, as a binary abstraction once removed from analogue typesetting, looks back at and into its shadow to perceive this now (mostly) absent act of textual production, and typesetting, in turn, looks shadow-ward to perceive the absence of the scribe's quill aquiver.

And then all this mark making, in its myriad of historic forms and modes of codification and representation, point to the larger absence of the experience or

idea that initially inspired their creation. Norman Bryson somewhat bleakly sums up this insubstantial shadow land of fading echoes and distorted mirror images:

“We are all, even to the depths of our perception,  
self-alienated in the sign. (44)

But without alienation, how could we conceive of and value connection?

#### *4. Objects in the Hood*

Entanglement, in a New Materialist sense, is the bringing together of separate domains as a means to see the diffraction patterns caused by resonances and dissonances. In this ‘seeing’ of entanglements made perceivable, therefore making conceivable new perceptions and ways of thinking, materially enacted entangling process becomes the last of the four planks of my methodological approach to investigating my research questions.

For entanglement to occur requires something, many things, to entangle. The separate domains of the semantic, semiotic, and the material, are a starting point for this, yet these domains are themselves divisible, and these divisions can entangle within themselves and then across in a web-forming manner into other domains’ divisions. I touched on an example of this within my work when discussing the print ‘Git’.

Reading text is structurally and habitually linear. When cohering the visual with the linguistic, non-linear dynamics are instigated, and rational analysis may struggle to unify the conflicting types of information derived from the simultaneous activity of these modes. Here lies the potential for emergent novel structures and relationships. The sometimes cyclic, sometimes chaotic interaction between modes is the operative focus.

Understanding what was possible to entangle and for what reason/outcome, required that I familiarised myself with what I was looking for, looking at, where to look, and how to look (please refer to Appendix 1). Developing the skills and knowledge to do this has been a difficult and fascinating research task.

## SUMMARY

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In addressing the question: What can I reveal by elevating text to the state of a performative player simultaneous to its semantic function within fictional situations? I have furnished a body of work in which I fabricated, found and placed textual objects as means to explore the interaction between the signifying role of a language sign and the signifying effects of a sign’s materiality. In these works, I have sought to create an oscillation between these modes of signification, thereby raising questions as to how meaning is formed and conveyed, and the relationship of perception and conception.

The works I have made generate a suite of ideas located around the multivalent roles signs play. The major emergent themes are; how language's conventional role as descriptor and communicator of events and ideas is complicated by its constructions of the world, reforming experiences within the reflections generated by its abstract and artificial make-up; how the act of belief required to conjure from a signifier its referent object generates a performative aspect to communications through language; materiality as a signifying agent allowing text forms to *be* and therefore have agency, as opposed to text's customary function as a medium through which knowledge is conveyed in a semantic form; bodily expression and gesture as an originating propulsion of language formation; and the Book as an iconic form that contains within the gift of symbols that allow the emergence of self-reflective consciousness.

I developed a methodology that utilised an Absurdist philosophy as a means to destabilise and entangle domains of order and dimensions of being, thus allowing language conventions and their effects to be seen afresh. The performative aspect of language as a communicative medium was reiterated by text forms as players, within a variety of narrative situations, thus instigating action and reaction, generating potential insights into my research field.

I embraced an expanded practice including drawing, digital imaging, collage, etching, animation, stereoscopic photography, book making, virtual reality, sculpture and found-object constructions. Content generated in one modality has been used as content in another, thereby transforming and reinterpreting its significance. Writing also was a necessary part of my project – I had to apply words as an essential generator of content. Discovering how best to use words within the context of my project's aims pushed my creative writing practice into new territory.

My making and my conclusions have been informed by theoretical movements such as Semiotics, Structuralism, Post-Structuralism, Phenomenology and New Materialism. Additionally, my take on an Absurdist philosophy has been a considered position from which I have approached my project. Absurdism has also provided a lens through which concepts suggested in the mentioned theoretical movements could be usefully re-constructed. Thinking through practice has led my way to and through these theoretical constructs.

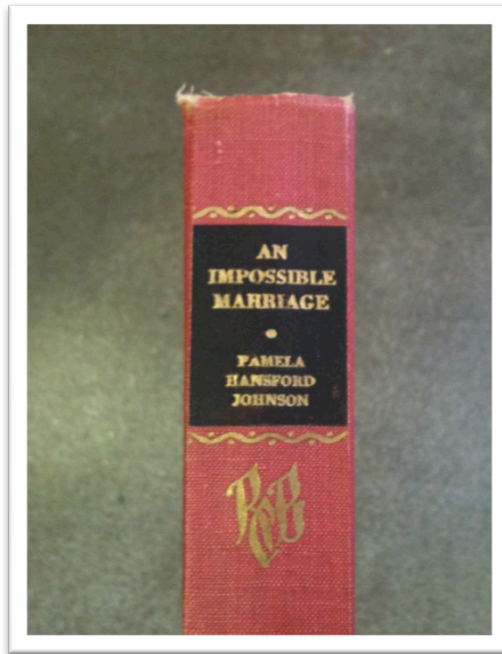
In regards to my second research question: What can I reveal about text and image relationships through the illusory and actual interplay of two and three-dimensional materiality? the complex interactions and interplay of forms used within my various projects, and the shifts in content therein, instigated a diverse range of conjunctions of two and three-dimensions within text and image relationships. These analogously questioned the veracity of communication through language in regards to the act of belief in the power of a signifier to evoke its referent object, i.e. the conjuring of three-dimensions from what was conspicuously two. Additionally, the various dimensional interplays utilised materiality in a diversity of forms and contexts and by so doing expanded my investigation into materiality's signifying agency.

My research project has generated a number of beneficial outcomes: my knowledge base regarding my field of research has substantially expanded, facilitating insights into sign making and the role signs play as makers of meaning and altering consciousness, which were literally inconceivable pre research; my research skills are more acute e.g. finding relevant information, assimilating it, and applying this new knowledge in both creative and academic ways to further my research; and I have created a body of art works that not only required developing new skills and accordant cross-modality working

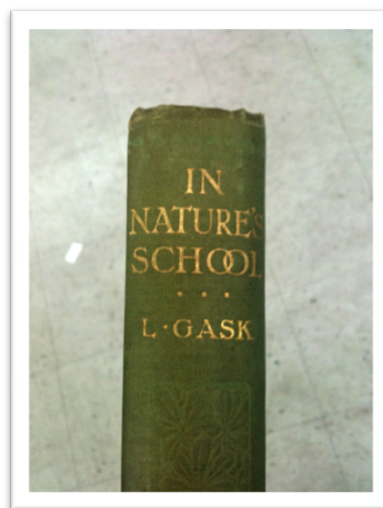
processes, but also, and this last point is the key one, communicated my ideas. In terms of responses from others, my research was well received through the three academic milestone presentations I made. However, these milestones had 'judgement' agendas in regards to the stage I was up to re my research progress, and therefore didn't focus purely on the artefacts made. This focus will be brought to bear on my art works within my project's upcoming examination presentation, supported by exegetical writing. If I were to re-conduct this project, I would set in place a series of exhibiting opportunities outside of the academic encompass, and so gather responses to my art works from a wider range of viewers looking only at the works made without verbal or text-based contextualisation.

Where to from here? Language and text were, in a way, the medium that enabled my examination of signs, and the act of belief, or suspension of belief, required for them to be useful when communicating. As a mainly visual artist, taking language as the fulcrum on which to turn and angle my research activities, has proved particularly useful, because of language's distance from the visual – a distance still present even when language was visualised as text. This distance created the room - and a complex, multi-dimensional room it was - in which I could experience and enquire. Now, however, I feel my art practice and thinking can move from language signs to sign use within visual representation, and in this context ask; what *is* a visual sign, what *makes* a visual sign capable of imparting knowledge and evoking emotion, and how does it *do* this?

And finally, in regards to the relationship between experience and language, are we playing out



or are we simply



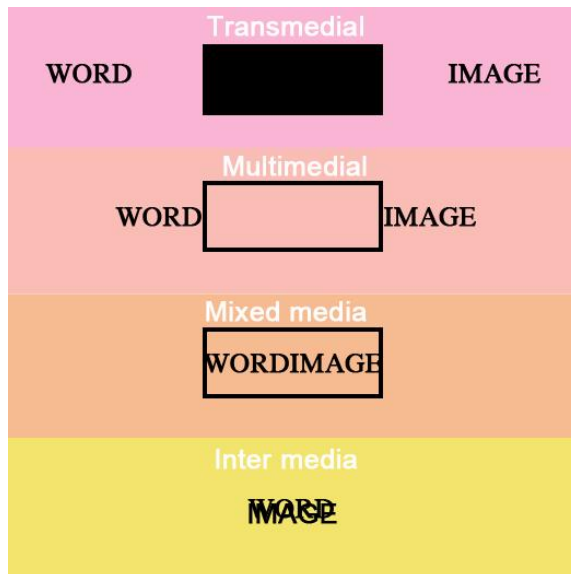
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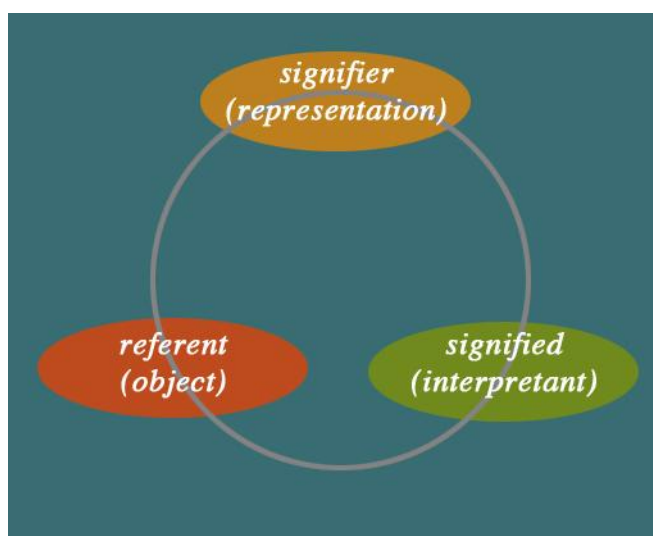
## APPENDIX 1

Diagrams of relevant domains and definitions:

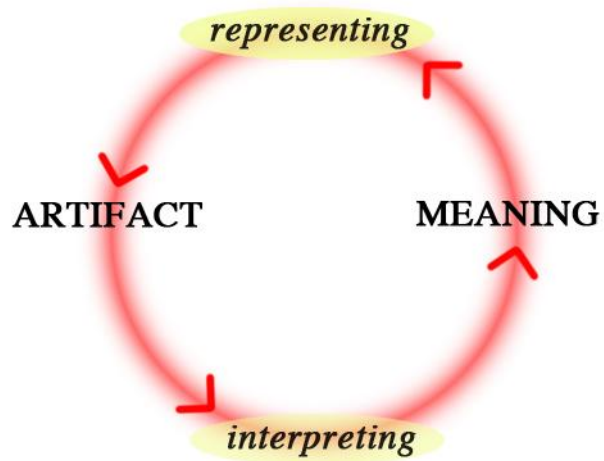
Text and Image relationships:



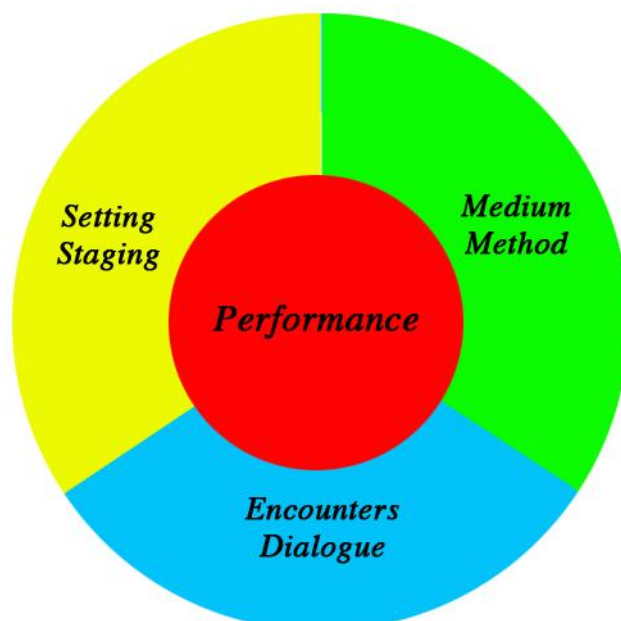
Semiotic relationships:



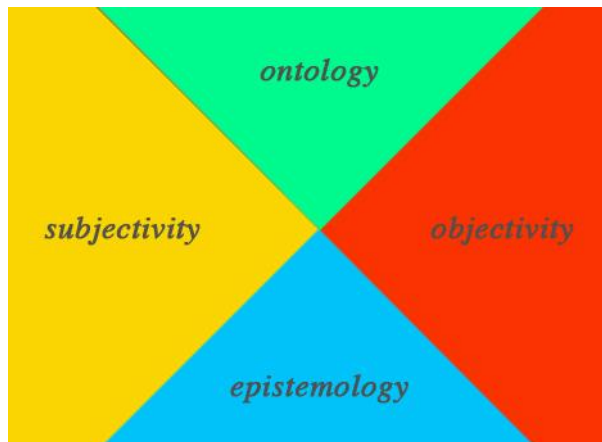
Processes between an artefact and meaning:



Enacted narrative construction:

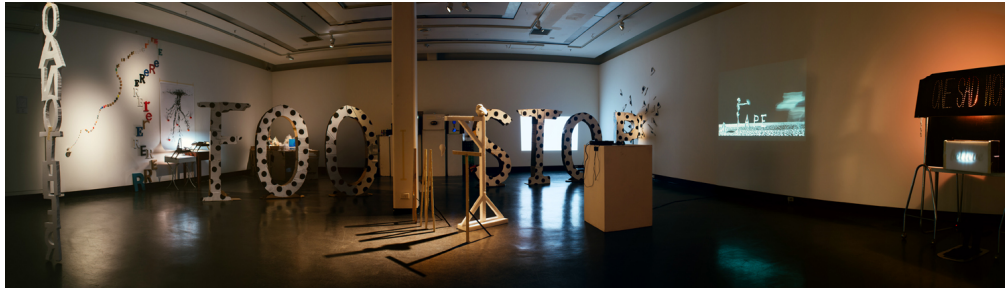


Philosophical positions:



## APPENDIX 2

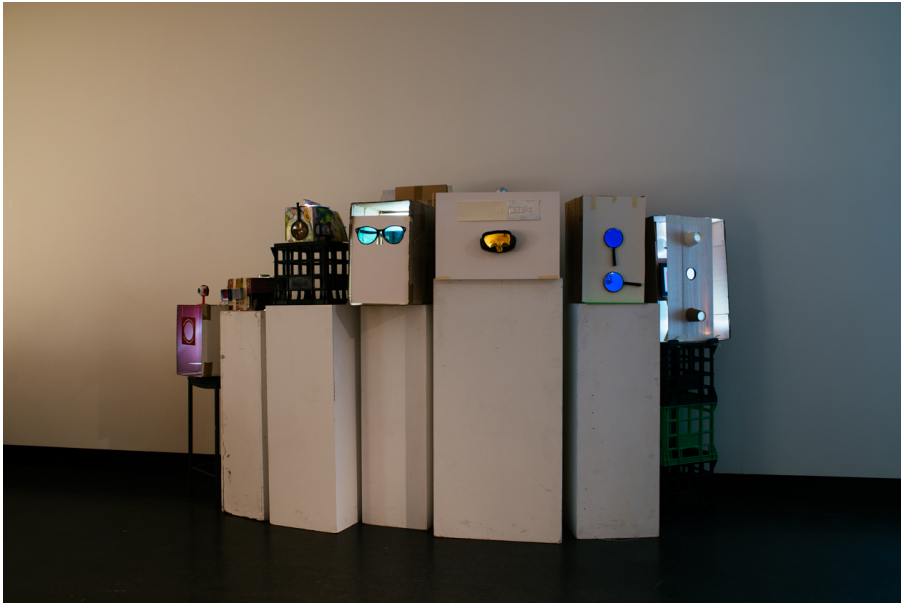
Images from final presentation:

























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20. "A concrete poem is a sculpture made of words, arranged in a certain style or shape to create a particular effect." <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/blogs/work-week-world-has-been-empty-romans-ian-hamilton-finlay> Retrieved on 26.05.16.

Concrete Poetry falls within a rich lineage of words as visual elements. "The history of visual poetry has been extensively documented. Dick Higgins, Florian Cramer, Richard Kostelanetz and Johanna Drucker (eminent among others) have each independently contributed to the now widely recognized lineage running from petroglyphs, illuminated manuscripts, picture poems, Dada, Lettrist, Fluxist, Concrete and book arts. The story often cites Sterne, Apollinaire, Mallarmé, Tristan Tzara, John Cage, and Jackson MacLow. It is a field of variations and intensely diverse styles." <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/assimilation> Retrieved on 20.03.15

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